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Wordsmith

A creative
writing course
for young people

By Janie B. Cheaney
Author of *The Wordsmith Series*

W O R D S M I T H

A CREATIVE WRITING COURSE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

by

Janie B. Cheaney

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SO YOU THINK YOU HATE WRITING

Think of a painting you're familiar with, like *Washington Crossing the Delaware*. The painting depicts an event that occurred long before the artist, Emmanuel Leutze, was born. Leutze had to form the picture in his head before he began painting--to decide on the shapes he wanted, and how the forms would be arranged, and what areas of the picture would be dark or light. What you recognize as *Washington Crossing the Delaware* is only the final product of many hours of thought and effort. Even for a simple composition, like the portrait known as *Whistler's Mother*, the painter has hundreds of decisions to make before he ever puts brush to canvas.

An artist usually makes lots of sketches, or "studies," to determine the **compositon**, the best way to arrange all the elements of the picture. Only when he is satisfied with the arrangement does he take out his brushes and start mixing paint. Even after the picture begins to take shape on canvas, the artist may discover that some of his ideas aren't working out as well as he had imagined and that changes will have to be made. Sometimes this is easy; sometimes it isn't. Sometimes an artist will abandon an incomplete painting and start over using a completely different arrangement.

By now you may be thinking you picked up an art book by mistake. What does painting have to do with writing? Not much, on the surface. But I'm using the comparison to help you understand what writing is.

In one sense, writing is painting a picture--in words.

Let's use *Washington Crossing the Delaware* as an example. If you had stood beside the river on that icy December night in 1776, you would not have seen anything that looked like Leutze's picture. Huddled shapes scurrying silently, perhaps an occasional gleam of moonlight on a gunstock, would be all you could make out in the darkness. And if you happened to catch a glimpse of Washington himself, he would have been sitting down in the boat! Leutze had something in mind besides just recording the scene. There were dozens of boats on the water, but instead he just one. Upon that one boat he concentrated every technique, every trick of lighting and color he had learned through years of study and practice. He wanted to show the courage and determination of the Commander-in-Chief, the uncomplaining heroism of the "ordinary" soldiers. That one boat and its cargo has come to represent in the minds of many people the spirit of the entire American Revolution. Quite an accomplishment for one painting!

A painter can't show everything, and a writer can't tell everything. Imagine what a job it would be to write a story that contained every thought you had and everything you did in one day. You could fill pages and pages but, unless you are a professional sky diver or Hollywood stunt man (and perhaps even then), those pages would be too boring to read. It wouldn't be a story at all, just a record--with all the drama and interest of a grocery list. A writer must thoughtfully choose the elements of the story and arrange them in such a way that the reader can "see" them in the mind's eye. Instead of color, form and light, a writer has to do it all with words--the hundreds of thousands of words in the English language. It's no wonder that writing is hard work. It's hard for me, and I'm a writer!

Even if you have no plans to be a writer, you will, at some time in your life, be faced with the necessity of putting your thoughts and feelings on paper. No need to panic! Writing well is hard, but it's not impossible. Just as you learned to talk early in your life, you can learn to write now. This book will teach you how to paint pictures with words. You will learn that some words "work harder" than others. Some styles succeed where others don't. Some "tricks" will help you write stronger, clearer sentences. And if you think you have nothing to write *about*, this book will make you think again. Some students may have an easier time than others expressing their thoughts on paper, but everybody has something to say.

Just as a blacksmith shapes iron and a silversmith shapes silver into objects both beautiful and useful, so a wordsmith shapes our huge, bulky language into forms that make us laugh, sigh, think or cry. That's a skill worth learning.

GET READY, GET SET . . .

If you had enrolled in a painting course, you would probably spend some time in the early classes learning how to hold a brush, how to mix paint, and how to stroke the paint onto canvas. In a similar manner, Parts One and Two of this book will teach you some techniques of writing, or how to use your tools. The third will give you some ideas about what to "paint," and how. No matter how accomplished a writer you believe yourself to be, it's best to start at the beginning of the book and work through to the end. Your assignments are to be written on ordinary notebook paper and *not* thrown away. Once you make a final copy of each assignment, keep it in a loose-leaf binder or portfolio along with this book.

Now that you know what to expect, think about your writing ability at this moment. Are you pretty good? Then you can use the tips included here to sharpen that talent. If you have no confidence at all, remember that you already have your "supplies"--language, one of God's most precious gifts to human beings. All you need to do is learn to use it.

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PART ONE: WORD GAMES

You're starting out with one great advantage: you know English. English is a fun language for writing because it contains so many words and offers so many different ways to put them together. For that very reason many beginning writers feel overwhelmed by the language itself and hardly know where to start. If you had a pile of 500,000 words before you, what would you do? Probably grab the words you feel most comfortable with (because you use them over and over) and arrange them in some way that sort of says what you kind of mean. But you can do better!

The first part of this book is designed to help you get a handle on words and learn how to use them better. I know you're already familiar with verbs, nouns, adjectives and the whole gang, but perhaps you could be on better terms with them. By the time you have worked through Part One, I hope you'll have some appreciation of just how wonderful and versatile these "tools" can be.

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1. NAME YOUR NOUNS

Everybody learned in third grade that a noun names a person, place or thing. But did you know that there are more nouns in the English language than any other part of speech? With such a treasury of nouns, it seems a shame not to take advantage of them.

When talking to each other we tend to be lazy, saying,

"Put that over there,"

When we could say,

"Put the crystal vase on the mantle," or,

"Put the lace tablecloth on the dining room table," or

"Put the cat in the dishwasher."

But writers can't be lazy. Look at this paragraph:

I watched two men talking in the park. They seemed to disagree about something. The first man raised his voice. The second man asked a question and the first man got even angrier. The second man laughed, but it didn't sound like a happy laugh. The first man rolled up his newspaper and I thought he was going to hit the second man over the head with it! Instead he hit his own hand

And so on. Does "first man," "second man," back and forth, seem a little repetitious to you? **First** and **second** are words that tell us nothing *about* these two men. Perhaps we could give them a little personality:

I watched two men talking in St. Francis Park. One was rather stout, wore a business suit, and carried a newspaper. The other was dressed in a greasy kaikai uniform, like an auto mechanic. They seemed to disagree about something. The stout man raised his voice. The other asked a question, which seemed to make the businessman even angrier. The mechanic laughed, but it didn't sound like a happy laugh. Mr. Businessman rolled up his newspaper and I thought he was going to hit his opponent over the head! Instead he brought the newspaper down on his own palm

Naming the park gives us a sense of being in a real place, not just any park. Dressing the two men in distinctive clothes helps us to identify them. Business suits are a type of "uniform," like the kaikai work clothes; a suit does not necessarily make a businessman, but that's how most men, so dressed, would first appear to us.

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But "mechanic" and "businessman," though handy labels, could become just as tiresome as "first man" and "second man." I came up with another name for Man #2: "his opponent." Not only does this word provide another label to use, but it helps us define the relationship between the two men.

Finally, notice that I changed "hand" to "palm" in the next-to-last sentence. The palm, as you know, is a part of the hand. You might hit your *hand* by accident, or as a humorous way of saying, "naughty, naughty" to yourself. But you would hit your *palm*, with a fist or ruler or rolled-up newspaper, to make a point or to show that you mean business. Try it yourself. Pick up your pencil and strike your knuckles, then the back of your hand, then your palm. Doesn't each of these actions send a different message? (Is anyone looking at you as though you'd lost your mind?)

By changing a few nouns and adding some details, I bring the picture of these two men into much sharper focus. Who's the more aggressive? What tells you the mechanic may be down on his luck? Who will probably win this argument?

In each case, the noun we substituted was more **concrete** than the original. Concrete is solid and specific as opposed to general and **abstract**. Concrete nouns make a firm foundation for your writing.

EXERCISE 1-A.

Below is a list of general nouns. By "general," I mean that these nouns can cover a broad area, like a corral. Inside a cattle corral you might find cows, calves, Herefords, Jerseys and bulls. A car corral might contain vans, convertibles, Chevys, Hondas and Austins. In the body corral we find noses, arms, toes and hips.

Write at least five concrete nouns for each general noun in the following list. The first one is done for you:

man father, painter, teacher, official, player
ball _____
tree _____
cup _____
dish _____
dog _____
street _____
day _____
bed (or anything to lie on) _____

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chair (or anything to sit on) _____

EXERCISE 1-B.

For each of the sentences below, write three more sentences, substituting specific nouns for the underlined words. Then add another sentence or phrase to tell what happened next. In each of the examples below, notice how a concrete noun changes the whole scenario. A *tractor* roaring up a *downtown boulevard* will produce different results from a *Porche* roaring up a *suburban cul-de-sac*, as your additional phrase or sentence should demonstrate.

EXAMPLE: John stopped the ball with his body.

John stopped the soccer ball with his hip. As it bounced away, he charged the other team.

John stopped the golf ball with his foot. "You're putting out of turn," he snapped.

John stopped the baseball with his head, then crumpled to the ground.

1. The car roared up the street.

1a. _____

1b. _____

1c. _____

2. The man walked his dog down Cherry Lane every morning.

2a. _____

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2b.

2c.

3. She put the flowers in a dish on the table.

3a.

3b.

3c.

4. Henry sat in the chair they showed him.

4a.

4b.

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4c. _____

5. Mrs. Prine was lying on a bed as we entered.

5a. _____

5b. _____

5c. _____

EXERCISE 1-C

Two words that you should handle with care are "thing" and "person." *Don't use them* unless you are fully convinced that either "thing" or "person" is the only word to use under the circumstances. The reason is, of course, that both words are far too vague. Before you use them, ask yourself if the "thing" or "person" could be specified.

In the sentences below, write an appropriate concrete noun over each underlined noun.

EXAMPLES:

In family life, love is the most important thing.
virtue, gift

Mrs. Jacobs was a demanding person.
teacher, woman

1. That night, the old man taught Angelina many things.
2. Most people don't like licorice.
3. Scott is the most exhilarating person I've ever known.

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4. Their house is full of things.
5. Get this thing off my back!
6. Ross kept tripping over things.
7. People who need people are the luckiest people in the world.

EXERCISE 1-D.

I hope you see what a difference a noun can make. Now try a short assignment. On a clean sheet of notebook paper, write a paragraph describing your living room. Your description should be **double-spaced**--that is, skip every other line. This will make it easier for you to write in corrections later. If you have trouble remembering to double-space, mark an "X" at the left side on every other line of your notebook paper. That will remind you not to write on that line.

In your description, *be specific*. If your living room contains a sofa-bed, call it a sofa-bed, not a couch. Chairs could be recliners, rockers, armchairs, Queen-Anne chairs, wing-back chairs--if you don't know how to identify them, ask someone. Pictures can be paintings, prints, photographs, landscapes, still lifes, portraits. You get the idea. Study the room, ask questions, identify, and write. Don't try to describe *everything* you see, but you should be able to fill one double-spaced page with no trouble.

(When you see a row of asterisks in this book, it means you are supposed to be writing. Don't proceed until you do.)

Once you've finished the description, turn to page 84 and read the section entitled "How to Proofread." Then read your paper carefully and correct any errors you find.

Here I'm going to teach you a new word and give you a warning at the same time. The word is **caveat** (CAH-vee-aht), and it comes directly from a Latin word meaning "Beware." Just because I have been singing the praises of concrete nouns in this chapter doesn't mean you should never use any other kind. General nouns are necessary when you have to name a group including many objects of a similar type; they're also useful when you want to avoid repetition of a specific noun. All nouns are to be used. Knowing where and how to use them is one of the keys to good writing.

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2. VERB POWER

Nouns and **verbs** are the basic building blocks of any language. If we had just these two, we could communicate with each other (although if we were that primitive, there wouldn't be much to say). All other parts of speech support nouns and verbs--explain about them; show their relationships to each other and to other nouns and verbs; modify, connect, describe, and negate them.

You may remember learning about a class of verbs which tell what a noun *is*: **is, was, were, be, am** and **are**. We call these **linking verbs** because they "link" a noun with another word that describes it. Linking verbs are common. Underline all the linking verbs in this paragraph. You should find two, besides the verbs that are printed in bold type.

Most verbs, however, show action, or tell what a noun *does*. Any verb to which the letters "-ing" can be joined is an action verb. Read down the list of words in Exercise 2-A below and mentally add "-ing" to each. Are they all action verbs? Even a verb like "sit," which isn't much of an action at all?

I believe one of the most positive steps a young writer can take is to cultivate a large "garden" of action verbs. That is, learn lots of them, and use the clearest, sharpest verbs you know to express what you have to say. Many action verbs are full of life--they sparkle, snap, roar, race, buzz, pop and shine. But beginning writers tend to settle for the drab verbs, like sit, walk, have. These serve an important function in our language, but they lack power and expression.

EXERCISE 2-A

Below is a list of several basic actions. How many different ways could you think of to do these things? Try to write at least three sharp, clear verbs for each action.

crawl	<u>grovel, shimmy, creep, scramble, scot</u>
walk	_____
talk	_____
run	_____
sit	_____
march	_____
say	_____
shout	_____
jump	_____

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By the way, I don't expect you to pull all these verbs out of your own imagination. Verbs are so important that I've made a list of some outstanding specimens and included it in this book. First, think of as many synonyms (words of similar meaning) as you can by yourself. Then, when your mind quits, turn to page 87 and check the list. Choose the verbs you like best or those that seem most expressive to you.

Another useful tool for these exercises, and for all future writing, is a **thesaurus**. This is not, as the name suggests, a small breed of dinosaur. A thesaurus is a book, much like a dictionary, which lists synonyms instead of definitions for each word. If you don't have one in your house, ask for one. Say, "Mom and Dad, forget about the dirt bike or Walkman I asked for last month. What I really want for my birthday is a thesaurus."

EXERCISE 2-B

Read over the synonyms you wrote for **walk**, **run** and **sit** in 2-A. In the following exercise, write sentences of your own using two of the synonyms you chose for each of those verbs. In each sentence, show what kind of person would walk, run or sit this particular way, and tell where he or she would do it.

EXAMPLE: (crawl)

**Type of person
where he'd do it**

The slave groveled
before the king's throne.

**Type of person
where he'd do it**

The little boy shimmied
under the porch
when his mother called.

(walk) _____

(run) _____

(sit) _____

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Verbs can change the emotional impact of a sentence as quickly as the stroke of a pen. Compare these three sentences:

Jenna walked to the desk and picked up the vase.

Jenna stalked to the desk and grabbed the vase.

Jenna waltzed to the desk and hugged the vase.

Nothing is wrong with the first sentence--it simply tells what Jenna did with no emotional charge. But if the writer is describing an angry scene, the second sentence gets the emotion across without even telling us that "Jenna was angry." The *verbs* tell us, all by themselves. In the last sentence the verbs alone tell us that Jenna is feeling ecstatic or triumphant.

EXERCISE 2-C

When the knock came, Sally walked to the door and opened it. She looked at the stranger for a few seconds, then said, "You're too late. Horace left an hour ago." Without another word, she closed the door.

All the verbs in the paragraph above are straightforward and **neutral**. That is, they don't give us a clue how Sally feels--about Horace, about the stranger, or about the entire situation. Over the underlined words in the paragraph above, write verbs that suggest Sally is feeling very sad. You may refer to the verb list on p. 87 if you're stumped.

Now, imagine that Sally has put one over on the stranger and is very pleased with herself. Fill in the blanks below with verbs that communicate her attitude.

When the knock came, Sally _____ to the door and opened it. She _____ at the stranger for a few seconds, then _____

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"You're too late. Horace left an hour ago."

Without another word, she closed the door.

EXERCISE 2-D

Here are some more short paragraphs for you to rewrite. Decide for yourself how the main character is feeling (angry? joyful? excited? disappointed? sad?), then substitute verbs that express, or at least help to express, that emotion.

1. Ivan ran across the street to where the policeman was standing. "Did you see that van?" he asked. "It must have been doing 90 miles an hour."
2. Bernice took a book from the shelf. "My aunt wrote this," she said. Then she walked across the room and put the book on John's lap.
3. The captain walked to Sergeant Bates and looked at him for a few seconds. "Do you know you're in officers' quarters?" he asked.

ANOTHER CAVEAT: Words like "walked" or "said" are indispensable--the language can't do without them and neither can you. A close reading of any of your favorite books will show that the author uses lots of colorless, neutral verbs. The more verbs you can add to your vocabulary the better writer you will be, but at the same time, don't pepper your prose with so many explosive verbs your reader feels like he's in a mine field. Experience will help you learn when and how to use those sparkling verbs you come across in reading or conversation. Cultivate your garden!

3. A WORD ABOUT ADVERBS - MODERATION

Adverbs tell how, when, where, and how much. They can often be recognized by their "-ly" ending (as in happily, luckily, suddenly), but the adverb family also includes:

often, always, now (tell when);
very, just (tell how much);
outside, here, there (tell where).

Adverbs, like all parts of speech, are useful and at times necessary. But many beginning writers, once they discover adverbs, seem to fall in love with them. Be careful not to use too many adverbs, especially of the "-ly" type. Frankly and confidentially, too many adverbs can very needlessly slow down your writing and absolutely get on the reader's nerves. Truthfully now, can you see what I mean?

One goal of good writing is to say what you need to say without unnecessary words. If your writing seems too wordy, the culprits are often superfluous (unnecessary) adverbs and adjectives. The most positive step you can take in trimming the "fat" adverbs from your work is, once again, to add more verbs to your vocabulary. Many adverb-verb combinations can be better expressed with a single strong verb.

walked carefully - tiptoed, crept, stole

said happily - sang, laughed, chirped

EXERCISE 3

In each blank below, write a verb that says in one word what each of these combinations says in two. (Some of these may be hard. Ask for help or turn to your thesaurus or verb list if you get stuck.)

said angrily _____	talked rapidly _____
walked quickly _____	said softly _____
stood sadly _____	pushed mightily _____
ran heavily _____	touched gently _____
spoke cruelly _____	wept loudly _____

I am not anti-adverb! Some of my best friends are adverbs. That's why I try not to overwork them; they tire easily.

4. THIS LOOKS LIKE A JOB FOR AN ADJECTIVE

Modify is a useful word to know when we talk about language. To **modify** means to explain something about--to describe, qualify or expand. The purpose of an adjective is to **modify** a noun.

You know how to use adjectives, but do you find yourself using the same ones over and over? The problem with adjectives is that the ones we use most often have lost their descriptive power.

For instance, how many times a day do you hear the word "nice"? Could you write a description that explains exactly what "nice" means? Most of us probably say "nice" at least once a day; it's a habit. If "nice" were yanked out of the language we'd probably suffer from "nice" withdrawal. But I want you to make a little rule for yourself: "For the next twelve months, or as long as it takes me to work through this book, I will *never* write the word 'nice' on paper." Not even to write, "Thank you for the nice present you sent me for Christmas." The reason for this is not that I'm a "nice"-hater, but that almost every writer needs practice in finding adjectives that explain precisely what he or she means by "nice." Now that you've read the word "nice" so many times I hope you're sick of it, we'll move on to another problem adjective.

What's so bad about "good"? Vagueness, again. When you say the movie was "good," do you mean it was exciting? funny? engrossing? spectacular? imaginative? With so many precise adjectives available, "good" should be avoided unless you've thought about it and are convinced that it's the best word to use in the context. Notice how a better adjective can clarify the meaning of the word "good":

good heart - merciful heart
good dog - loyal dog
good book - entertaining book
good wife - faithful and industrious wife

Would you say that "merciful" and "faithful" mean the same thing? Probably not, and yet I used them to substitute for the same word (in different situations). They explain what makes their subject "good." Usually, something is considered "good" when it meets our expectations, and we expect qualities in a book that we don't necessarily expect from a dog. In the same way, we call something "bad" when it doesn't measure up to certain standards.

EXERCISE 4-A

How many adjectives could you substitute for the word "good"? Choose appropriate adjectives for the following nouns. You'll find a list of adjectives below the exercise, many of which may be used more than once. Try to think of some on your own.

_____ sermon
_____ song

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_____ king
_____ costume
_____ play
_____ student
_____ teacher
_____ book

Adjectives to choose from: thoughtful, noble, just, intricate, beautiful, glittering, interesting, exciting, clever, challenging, hilarious, melodious, moving, scary, obedient, intelligent, wise, and any others that come to mind.

If you were thinking of adjectives like "great," "wonderful," or "fantastic," to substitute for "good," consider this paragraph:

Our week at camp was fantastic. Fishing in the river was fabulous and the pool was great. After chapel every night a tremendous speaker gave a talk and lots of kids were saved. Our counselors were wonderful, too. The food was okay.

All that the underlined adjectives tell us is that the speaker liked camp--a lot. But they tell us nothing *about* camp. The following paragraph conveys more information:

Our week at camp was fantastic. Fishing in the river was fun and the pool was huge. After chapel every night an inspiring speaker gave a talk and lots of kids were saved. Our counselors were helpful and understanding, too. The food was okay.

No, I didn't change "fantastic" because that word sums up the whole camp experience. The rest of the paragraph explains *why* camp was so fantastic.

EXERCISE 4-B

Ugly, delicious, beautiful, excellent and **poor** are all respectable adjectives, but you can find better ones if you think carefully about the noun you wish to modify. The qualities that make a pizza "delicious" are not at all the same qualities that make ice cream "delicious."

Try to write at least two adjectives that explain *why* each of the following nouns are what they are. The first one is done for you as an example.

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"ugly"	<i>ragged, gaudy</i>	dress
	<i>grimy, stark, unkempt</i>	building
	<i>spiteful, cruel, coarse</i>	remark
"delicious"		cantaloupe
		pizza
		hamburger
		ice cream
"beautiful"		garden
		hat
		sunset
		story
"excellent"		letter
		painting
		work
"poor"		letter
		painting
		work

EXERCISE 4-C

Adjectives can be used to express a wide range of emotions, as you will see in the following exercise. Think of as many synonyms as you can for the following words. If you haven't received your thesaurus yet, get a parent or friend to help you.

Examples: **Angry** - irritated, peeved, furious, enraged
Happy - ecstatic, blissful, content, pleased

Sad - _____

Mean - _____

Excited - _____

Fearful - _____

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Some of the adjectives you chose show *degrees* of the same thing. "Terrified," for example, is "third degree" fear--the fear of someone who may be facing death. Also, you probably chose some adjectives that indicate a different *type* of the same thing. "Cruel" and "petty" are different qualities, or types, of meanness: someone who's petty holds little grudges and spiteful thoughts, but a cruel person takes pleasure in causing obvious pain.

EXERCISE 4-D

Put some of your adjectives to work now. From the list you made above, substitute an adjective for the underlined word in each of the following sentences, then write an additional sentence showing what a person who felt like this might say.

EXAMPLE A: The happy girl sighed.

The blissful girl sighed. "The situation couldn't have worked out better."

The contented girl sighed. "That was a wonderful dinner, Mrs. Alberti."

EXAMPLE B: Mr. Jones looked angry.

Mr. Jones looked irritated. "What do you want now, Roger?"

Mr. Jones look furious. "Don't you ever come near my daughter again!"

1. The mean man laughed.

The _____ man laughed. " _____ "

The _____ man laughed. " _____ "

2. I'd never seen John look so sad.

I'd never seen John look so _____. " _____ "

I'd never seen John look so _____. " _____ "

3. The excited little girl squeaked.

The _____ little girl squeaked, " _____ "

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The _____ little girl squeaked, " _____"

4. Toby was plainly fearful.

Toby was plainly _____. " _____"

Toby was plainly _____. " _____"

TWO CAVEATS:

1. No rule tells you how many adjectives you can string together. But in general it's best to limit your adjectives, and remember that many nouns, especially concrete and specific nouns, can stand quite well on their own. Nouns and verbs are the meat and potatoes of language--adjectives are the salt. They are used to accent the flavor of your writing, not to overpower it. Too many adjectives can create a jungle, like this:

Witty, elegant and charming Mr. Gray strolled across his spacious, emerald-green, manicured lawn in the golden, mellow twilight.

2. Another pitfall for beginning writers is **colloquial** adjectives, those expressions we use in everyday speech and slang. Some examples are "weird", "gross," and "awesome," all of which have fairly narrow, specific meanings in the dictionary. But because these words have come to have such broad meanings in ordinary conversation, it's best to avoid them in your writing unless you look them up first and use them in their proper dictionary context.

EXERCISE 4-E

To conclude your work on adjectives, write a restaurant review! If you're interested in food, this could be fun. First, consult your local paper, or nearest big-city paper, for a restaurant review. If you don't take a newspaper, copy a review at the library. Many newspapers run restaurant reviews on specific days of the week.

Underline all the adjectives in the review. Notice how the reviewer uses adjectives to describe the food, atmosphere, and service. If he or she is a good writer, you should find many precise, descriptive adjectives. In fact, you may be surprised at how many ways there are to describe food!

Now, ask your parents to take you out for lunch or dinner--after all, it's for *school*. If this is not possible, pretend you are "dining out" at your own house. Write a long, double-spaced paragraph, honestly evaluating the food, service, and atmosphere and using several specific, descriptive adjectives (don't use "good" more than once). Be sure to proofread and make corrections when you're done.

5. WHAT ARE PREPOSITIONS, ANYWAY?

In spite of their long name, **prepositions** are little words you don't even notice because they don't call attention to themselves. Compared to all the other parts of speech we've studied, prepositions are few in number. In fact, I can list the most common prepositions in one paragraph:

about above across after against along among around at
before behind below beside between beyond by during for
from in into of on over past through to toward under unto
up with

The job of a preposition is to turn a noun into a modifier. This concept is easier to show than it is to explain, and I'm afraid we'll have to get into a little grammar. Consider this sentence:

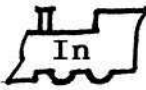
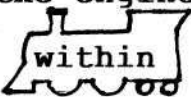
The girl with the green hat perched on the gate.

Hat and **gate** are both nouns, but neither is the subject of the sentence. **Hat** belongs at the end of a little string of words beginning with **with**, a preposition. "With the green hat" is a **prepositional phrase** and it's used to describe the subject--"girl." **With the green hat** modifies **girl**, because the preposition has hooked up the noun "hat" and put it in service of another noun.

The other noun, **gate**, is also at the end of a prepositional phrase, a shorter one this time. **On** is the preposition, and just like **with**, it turns a noun into a modifier. But this time the word to be modified is not a noun. **On the gate** tells us *where* the girl sat, and you remember from Section 3 that telling **where** is the purpose of an adverb. The entire phrase **on the gate** is therefore to be treated as an adverb, because it modifies the verb.

Are you still with me?

The value of prepositions for a creative writer is their "moveability." If you're not too old for cute word pictures, you can think of a prepositional phrase as a little word train, with the preposition itself as the engine. In many cases the engine can pull its train to other "stations" within the sentence. This is how it works:

 **In** many cases the engine can pull its train to other "stations"  **within** the sentence.

1. We could back engine #1 to a spot behind the subject:

The engine, **in many cases**, can pull its train to other "stations" **within the sentence**.

2. Or drop #1 all the way back to the end:

The engine can pull its train to other "stations" **within the sentence, in many cases**.

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3. Or direct #1 and #2 to change places:

Within the sentence, the engine can pull its train to other "stations," **in many cases.**

4. Or go completely wild:

The engine, **within the sentence, in many cases,** can to other "stations" pull its train.

Obviously, some arrangements work better than others. Examples #2 and #3 are awkward, because "in many cases" modifies the verb (it tells when). Placing it so far from the verb breaks up the flow of the sentence. Also in example #3 the subject (engine) is obscured by a phrase that has little direct relation to it. The original sentence and the first rewrite work best.

EXERCISE 5-A

Prepositional phrases are fun to play with and could open up new sentence structures for you. Notice that all the sentences below are arranged with the subject at the beginning and the prepositional phrase at the end. Rewrite each sentence twice. First, move the underlined phrase to the beginning of the sentence. Next, move the phrase to a spot just behind the subject. Then put a check by the version that sounds better to you.

1. The soldier whistled softly from the hedge.

2. An unpleasant surprise lurked behind our front door.

3. The crowd was having a party in the smoking section.

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4. Kirby lost the race in spite of his training.

5. Sarah received her inspiration under the walnut tree.

EXERCISE 5-B

On a clean sheet of paper, write your own sentences for each of these prepositional phrases, then rewrite each sentence at least once, moving the prepositional phrase to another spot. Does it always work?

in the dark
under the table
beside the bed

within the mind
above the clouds
by the sea

ANOTHER CAVEAT: Sometimes a prepositional phrase adds little to a sentence except words. Watch out for the "wordies"! In good writing, *every word counts*. Some phrases to avoid are:

at this point in time ("now" is better)
for each and every one ("for all")
in the final analysis ("finally")

6. DID ANYBODY GET THE NAME OF THAT PRONOUN?

Pronouns act as "stand-ins" for nouns. Rather than, "Daryl swatted at the fly on Daryl's nose even though Daryl couldn't see the fly," pronouns allow us to say, "Daryl swatted at the fly on **his** nose even though **he** couldn't see **it**." Thanks to the pronoun, we can add, "It was a stupid thing for him to do." I'm sure you understand personal pronouns such as **she**, **you**, **our**, and **him**. English also has impersonal pronouns (like "it"), relative pronouns, indefinite pronouns and interrogative pronouns. We'll discuss relative pronouns later. The others you may look up in any grammar book, if you're curious.

Personal pronouns can be a problem when two or more people are talking or acting at once. The writer has to be careful that the reader understands who "he" or "she" is. The identity of "her" in "Anne broke her necklace" is clear, but suppose that "When Anne and Mae went shopping, she broke her necklace." Whose necklace is it now?

"My brother received a letter from President Reagan when he was in second grade." Hold it! Who was in second grade, your brother or the President?

Every pronoun must have an **antecedent**: that is, a noun somewhere nearby which the reader understands to be the person, place or thing represented by the pronoun. In the sentence about Anne and Mae, the mystery of the necklace can be solved by making **Anne** the only subject, and moving **Mae** to a prepositional phrase. In the sentence below, **Anne** and **she** are both subjects, so one is understood to be the antecedent of the other:

When Anne went shopping with Mae, she broke her necklace.

In the sentence about my brother and the President, all we have to do is move **when he was in the second grade** next to the antecedent:

My brother, when he was in the second grade, received a letter from President Reagan.

Or, When my brother was in the second grade, he received a letter from President Reagan.

If too many words go by without an antecedent, the reader may lose track of who "he" or "she" is. This is especially confusing in a scene between two or more people of the same sex.

The Cabin 16 pillow fight was a night to remember. First, Katie swiped the counselor's pillow. "Hey! Lights out!" she yelled. Monica swung her pillow in the dark and hit her on the head by mistake. Soon everybody was in the act: Jeanne walloped Monica. She got back at her with a smack that knocked her down. Then she swung at Katie and broke her lamp.

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Before reading further, circle the pronouns in the paragraph above that are unclear to you.

Did you circle all of them? It's anybody's guess who's doing what to whom with whose pillow. Most of the confusion is easy to clear up:

First Katie swiped the counselor's pillow. "Hey!" yelled Pam, the counselor. "Lights out!" Monica swung her own pillow in the dark and hit Pam on the head by mistake.

Giving the counselor a name enables us to identify her without hearing **counselor** repeated more than once. We insert the little word **own** between **her** and **pillow** so the reader understands without doubt whose pillow hit Pam on the head.

Soon everybody was in the act: Jeanne walloped Monica, who got back at Jeanne with a smack that knocked her down. Then Monica swung at Katie and broke a lamp.

Here I combine two sentences and enlist the service of **who** as a **relative pronoun**--so called because it *relates* to a previous noun. In this sentence there should be no doubt that **who** relates to Monica since **Monica** is the noun closest to it. Jeanne is then named again and the following **her** can be understood to refer to Jeanne, since both are objects. (If the writer wants to show that it was *Monica* who fell down, the whole sentence should be restructured.) Finally, I substituted **a lamp** for **her lamp** because by this time the reader doesn't care whose lamp it was.

EXERCISE 6

In the following paragraph, circle the pronouns whose antecedents are unclear. Then, above those words, use a proper noun, a substitute identification (such as "his brother"), or a relative pronoun (such as "who") to identify the antecedent.

Chester and Lester went shopping for their mother's birthday present. Chester wanted to look in the jewelry department but Lester preferred kitchenware. He disagreed with the statement that "Mom will think we're only interested in her cooking." "What kind of jewelry could we get for ten dollars and forty-seven cents?" he demanded. After some argument he proposed a compromise, and they bought their mother a basketball.

SUMMARY OF PART ONE

I hope you've learned something new about the old familiar parts of speech. To pull it together, here's what you should remember:

1. **Nouns are the naming words.** Use concrete, specific nouns whenever possible.
2. **Verbs are used to show action or to link a noun with another word that describes it.** Strong, vivid action verbs will add "zip" as well as emotional impact to your writing.
3. **Adverbs tell when, where, how, or how much.** Adverbs, especially "-ly" adverbs, should be used with discretion.
4. **Adjectives modify nouns.** Adjectives should be specific and clear and not too numerous. Avoid colloquial adjectives as a rule, unless you are writing dialogue.
5. **Prepositions are used to turn nouns into modifiers.** The resulting prepositional phrase usually modifies a verb, but can modify a noun. Prepositional phrases can often be moved to add variety to your sentences, but the phrase should usually be placed near the word it modifies.
6. **Pronouns act as "stand-ins" for nouns.** When pronouns are used, the antecedents must always be understood.
7. **Words are the basic tools of writing.** Make every word count!

PART TWO: BUILDING STRONGER SENTENCES

A rich, wide vocabulary is to the writer what fine fabrics are to a dressmaker, or pure gold and cut diamonds to a jeweler. The words are the material you have to work with. But the finest material can be spoiled by sloppy craftsmanship. Imagine giving a bolt of velvet to a seamstress who only knows how to make gunny sacks! The broadest vocabulary in the world will not help you if you don't understand how to fashion all those words you know into sentences.

The skill of a writer shows in his sentences. Just like dressmaking, cabinetmaking, goldsmithing, and any other craft, sentence structure is governed by rules, the body of which we call grammar. Like other crafts, these rules begin at a simple, basic level and become more complicated as our skills develop. I'm still learning some of those rules, after thirty years of writing. In the section to follow you will not learn all the rules you will ever need to know about sentence structure; it's doubtful that any one book could do that. But by careful attention and practice you will learn some guiding principles--and break some bad habits, perhaps.

1. LET'S GET DOWN TO BASICS

Every sentence is divided into two parts, **subject** and **predicate**. The **subject** is usually a noun or pronoun. The **predicate** must contain a verb. Beyond this, a sentence must express a complete thought.

Unless you are able to find the subject and recognize the verb in a given sentence, you will become hopelessly lost in Part Two. We don't want this to happen, so let's review. The paragraph above contains four simple sentences. If you remember three facts about subjects you should have no trouble finding the subject of each of the four sentences. A subject: 1) is usually a noun or pronoun; 2) tells what the sentence is about; 3) comes at or near the beginning of the sentence. *Before reading any further*, underline the subject in each sentence of the first paragraph on this page.

Once the subjects are underlined, circle the verbs. This may not be so simple, unless you remember the two main classes of verbs, **action** and **linking**. Look back to page 8 to brush up on linking verbs, and remember that any word to which "-ing" may be added is an action verb. You should find that some of the sentences in the first paragraph contain both kinds of verbs. The linking verb "is" in the first sentence, however, has changed roles and become what we call a helping, or **auxiliary** verb. "Must" in the two following sentences is also an auxiliary verb. **Must, might, should, will**, and often **have** and **had**, fall into this category. Auxiliary verbs can be recognized by the fact that they always accompany action verbs.

The words in the first paragraph that you should have underlined are: **sentence, subject, predicate, sentence**. These are all the subjects. The verbs are: **is divided, is, must contain, must express**. If you missed any of these, or had any trouble locating them, STOP NOW, find a grammar book and review until you are comfortable with these concepts.

In that same first paragraph, I said that a sentence must contain a complete thought. "Cheops built the Great Pyramid" (quick! what's the subject and verb?) is a complete thought. So is, "She sat." Both examples state a simple fact that can stand alone. But if I wrote "*When* Cheops built the Great Pyramid," or, "*Because* she sat," would these be complete? Somehow we expect more from them. These thoughts were begun, but not completed.

Incomplete sentences are known as **fragments**. Fragments are rather in fashion these days, especially in advertising copy. You've seen it. In magazines. To get your attention. Make you think. Sounds like someone is talking directly to you. But too much of it. Drives you crazy.

An experienced writer can get away with using sentence fragments *occasionally*. He or she knows the rules but also knows when it's okay to break them. Yes, writing rules can be broken, but only by writers who understand what they're doing.

This is important. A chemistry student doesn't walk into the lab on his first day of class and start mixing chemicals willy-nilly. He first learns the lab procedures, the periodic table of elements, and the chemical properties. Once he fully understands the basics, he has earned the right to experiment. **In the same way, you must learn how to write strong, clear, complete sentences, and write *hundreds* of them.** Only then will you be entitled to experiment with fragments.

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For now, make it a point to allow *no* sentence fragments in your work. The one exception might be if you are writing a direct quote (more about that later).

2. SECRETS OF CONSTRUCTION

A good writer strives for variety; the quickest way to kill a reader's interest is to begin all your sentences the same way and make them roughly the same length. To see what I mean, read this description:

(1) My room has pale blue walls and a yellow carpet on the floor. (2) It has a bed in the north corner. (3) I have a blue comforter on my bed. (4) My room has lots of pictures on the walls. (5) There is a dresser, and also a rocking chair and an exercise bike. (6) I like my room.

EXERCISE 2-A

If the writer *really* likes her room she could try to make it sound more interesting. Look carefully at the sentences that make up the above paragraph and list the subject and verb for each in the spaces below. Remember that a pronoun (such as "it") can be a subject.

- | | |
|----------|----------|
| 1. _____ | 4. _____ |
| 2. _____ | 5. _____ |
| 3. _____ | 6. _____ |

What do you think is the main problem with this paragraph? Hint: Did you discover that **room** (or the stand-in pronoun **it**) is the subject in three of the sentences? That **has** (or **have**) is used *four times*? Four times is at least three times too many for such a weak verb. If you listed **there** as the subject of the fourth sentence, you were wrong, but it was a natural mistake. The subject is actually "dresser," and "there" is an adverb. "There" is also a wimpy sentence opener. The result of these flaws is a paragraph that could win prizes for descriptive writing at the National Boredom Festival. We'll shake up the sentences one at a time and startle some life into them.

My room has pale blue walls and a yellow carpet on the floor.

We'll make **walls** and **carpet** the subject, change the verb, and eliminate the useless phrase **on the floor**. (Where else would a carpet be?)

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Blue walls and a yellow carpet make my room bright and sunny.

or, Blue walls and a yellow carpet brighten my room.

The next two sentences could be combined and rearranged with some help from our friends, the preposition family:

In the north corner stands my bed, covered with a blue comforter.

Now we will exchange a subject and verb again, and add some detail about the pictures:

Lots of pictures, mostly landscapes and nature scenes, decorate the walls.

Next we'll do away with the word **there**, discard **also** and shape up the list:

Other furnishings include a dresser, a rocking chair and an exercise bike.

or, A dresser, a rocking chair and an exercise bike fill the empty spaces.

Finally, **I like my room** could be re-stated to tell the reader why this room is likeable.

My room is a comfortable place to be.

or, In my room I can relax and just be myself.

EXERCISE 2-B

Compare the above paragraph to the description of your living room that you wrote back in Part One. No doubt your nouns are terrific, but how are the sentences? What would you change about the paragraph? Rewrite your living room description, with the same information but different sentence structures. Experiment; try changing the subject, or opening with a prepositional phrase.

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Sentences are versatile, and part of the fun of writing is discovering new ways to rearrange them. One way to explore structure is through a technique called **transformation**. This usually involves rearranging the subject and changing or altering the verb.

Let's start with a structure that should be all-too-familiar by now, the "they have" or "it has" trap which often snares beginners when they have to write descriptions. The verb "has" works better with people than with things. "Tim has a leather jacket" makes more sense than "The jacket has two zipper pockets." Technically, a jacket or room or town cannot *have* anything in the sense of possessing it. Here's a foolproof formula for escaping the trap:

object → subject; "has" → 

That is, turn the object (the noun on the right side of the verb) into the subject and substitute a stronger verb (SuperVerb) for "has."

EXAMPLES: The clock face has two golden hands.
Two golden hands adorn the clock face.

The cup has a broken handle.
A broken handle makes the cup almost useless.

EXERCISE 2-C

Try transforming these "It has" sentences using the formula. In each example, the underlined words will become the subject of the new sentence.

1. My room has a four-poster bed.

_____.

2. The house has four windows.

_____.

3. Our back yard has a huge oak tree.

_____.

4. Howardville has a large library.

_____.

5. The Pride Park swimming pool has a slide.

_____.

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Starting a sentence with the word "There" is proper and correct, but beginning writers should never do it. This is because beginning writers often overdo it, and there is probably no weaker sentence construction in English than "There is." That's not to say that all your sentences have to be superheroes, but (once again) **only after you learn to write strong sentences will you understand how to use the weaker ones.** For the duration of this course do *not* start a sentence with the words "There is." The easiest way to transform the "There is" construction is the same way you handled "It has": Move the noun on the right side of the verb over to the left, thus transforming it into the subject. The linking verb "is" (or "are") can be retained, but with a little imagination you could do better.

There is a chicken on the road.

Transformation A: A chicken is on the road.

Transformation B: A spotted hen pecks her way down the road.

Transformation A is correct, but it doesn't tell us any more than the original sentence did. Transformation B is much better because it helps us see the chicken by showing us what she does (and adds a little detail through the noun and adjective).

EXERCISE 2-D

Using the formula again, transform these sentences to eliminate "There." Make the underlined words the subject, and try to substitute an action verb for **is, are, or was.**

1. There is a fountain in the park.

_____.

2. There are two children in the family.

_____.

3. There was a hat with an ostrich plume on the shelf.

_____.

4. There was a giant named Goliath among the Philistines.

_____.

5. There are three office buildings at Main and Strather.

_____.

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Another useful sentence construction is **passive voice**. This is a point of grammar that's easier to show than to explain. "Voice" refers to the relationship between subject and verb. In **active voice** the subject is *doing* the action:

Active: Cindy threw the ball.

In **passive voice** the subject is *receiving* the action:

Passive: The ball was thrown by Cindy.

Notice how the subject changes from **Cindy** to **ball**, but the meaning of the sentence remains the same. In this and the following examples, which of the two seems the more forceful statment?

A: Andy learned the new program in seven weeks.

P: The new program was learned by Andy in seven weeks.

A: Pop poked the putter into the pit.

P: The putter was poked into the pit by Pop.

If you said "active," you're right. Active voice is preferred for strong, vigorous writing.

EXERCISE 2-E

Transform these sentences--if **active**, change to **passive**; if **passive**, then to **active**. If you're confused about which is which, think about it: is the subject *doing* or receiving the action? Put a check mark beside the version that sounds better to you. But be careful! Don't just mark all the active sentences; sometimes the passive voice actually works better. After you've marked them, we'll find out why.

1. The symphony's performance was wildly applauded.

2. Randy finally finished the race.

3. They deliver the mail later on Saturdays.

4. "The Gold Bug" was written by E. A. Poe.

5. Many island natives were killed by the volcano.

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6. The world was so loved by God that He gave His only Son.

7. Our "little" faults are often swept under the rug.

8. Men's souls are tried by these times.

9. His own works praise a wise author.

10. Susan loves all babies.

Once you've marked the version of each sentence that you prefer, ask yourself this question: Which words in that sentence seem the most important? Circle the words.

Do you see a pattern in the words you circled? I would guess that you circled the subject in most of the sentences. The subject is what or who the sentence is *about*. It holds the sentence up, just as a fencepost supports a fence. Compare these three transformations from Exercise 1- E:

Active

1. The audience wildly applauded the symphony's performance.
2. They deliver the mail later on Saturdays.
3. His own works praise a wise author.

Passive

- The symphony's performance was wildly applauded.
- The mail is delivered later on Saturdays.
- A wise author is praised by his own works.

All of these sentences read better in the passive voice because of their *subjects*. If we want to emphasize the excellence of the symphony, then "the symphony" should be the subject. "The mail" makes a much stronger subject than the pronoun "they." Since we want to make a point about a wise author, "a wise author" should be the subject, rather than "his own works."

Whether to use passive voice usually depends on which noun makes a better subject. For that reason, we're fortunate to have two voices to choose from. But don't forget my first point: for strong, forceful writing, choose active.

Here's another room--a little out of the ordinary but described in a very ordinary way. Transform these drab sentences to give this room the class it deserves.

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

3. MAKING CONNECTIONS

Too many short sentences in a row can make you feel like you're trying to drive in a traffic jam: start, stop. Start, stop. Spare your reader this frustration by learning how to combine short sentences. Our language allows several ways to do this. The simplest way to combine two sentences is by using a connector: a **coordinating conjunction** (and, but, or, for); a **subordinating conjunction** (as, while, although, since, etc.); or special punctuation.

Coordinating conjunctions connect words or phrases of the same kind: two nouns, two verbs, two prepositional phrases, two complete sentences. It's a fancy name for something you already understand:

Robbie plays keyboard. Jimmy does the vocals.
Robbie plays keyboard **and** Jimmy does the vocals.

A magician was next on the program. We
didn't enjoy his performance.

A magician was next on the program, **but** we
didn't enjoy his performance.

A **subordinating conjunction**, however, makes one of the sentences unequal, and dependent on the other:

Robbie plays keyboard **while** Jimmy does the
vocals.

Though a magician was next on the program,
we didn't enjoy his performance.

I said "dependent" because adding the little words **while** and **though** to the sentences above made them incomplete and unable to stand on their own. It may not seem fair, but that's grammar. Those little words look like prepositions but don't be deceived; their function is not the same at all.

Certain punctuation marks serve as connectors; the best known is the semicolon (look closely and you'll see one). You are already familiar with commas, but *commas cannot join two complete sentences*. I want to emphasize this point because many people, adults and children both, make this mistake. Commas cannot join complete sentences. That's a big job, and it takes heavy-duty punctuation. Use a semicolon:

Robbie does the vocals; Jimmy plays the
keyboard.

A magician was next on the program; we didn't
enjoy his performance.

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Semicolons were more popular in the past than they are now, as a glance at any page of a Dickens novel will show you. They are useful but, like any other device, should be used in moderation.

Another way to connect sentences is with a dash--like this. Some English experts do not consider the dash to be a proper sentence connector, but the rules are probably changing. A dash can indicate a sudden break in the middle of a sentence--like a quick breath--before plunging on to the end. If used too much they leave the reader feeling breathless. Dashes can add a bit of dash to your writing but, once again--don't overdo it! If a page you've written looks like Morse code, you've probably overdone it.

4. COMBINATIONS

Simple connections are easy, but can become just as monotonous as short, choppy sentences. Fortunately, we are ready to move into a new realm of structure, where it's possible to take *part* of one sentence and set it right in the middle of another. There are several ways to do this.

METHOD NUMBER ONE. One way to combine sentences is to remove one of the subjects, place the remaining predicate inside the related sentence, and set it off with commas. Example 1 shows how this is done:

1. A short sentence can be reduced to a single phrase. This phrase can then be inserted into a related sentence.

A short sentence, reduced to a single phrase, can be inserted into a related sentence.

METHOD NUMBER TWO. Relative pronouns ("who," "which" and "that") are invaluable when it comes to combining. Study this example:

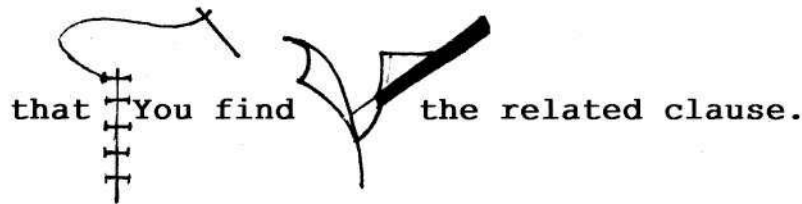
2. You find the related clause. Then place it in the main sentence.

Place the related clause **that** you find in the main sentence.

A **clause** is a group of related words that contains a subject and a verb, but is *not* a complete sentence. You remember how we made a clause of "Jimmy does the vocals" by adding the little word **while**. To understand how clauses and relative pronouns work, allow me to use an illustration.

I am Doctor Cheaney, the famous "wordologist," who just performed major surgery on the first sentence in example 2 above:

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I removed its object and implanted the relative pronoun **that**. The operation was a success and the patient became a cripple--that is, an incomplete sentence. This may seem like bad news for the patient, but actually it isn't. The "surgery" allowed me to transplant one weak sentence into another, turning two weak sentences into one strong, flowing sentence. This is the purpose of combining.

METHOD NUMBER THREE. You may have read, in some forgotten grammar book, of **participles**. Did you ever figure out what a participle was? It's not that difficult; a **participle** is an "altered" verb.

Another illustration: A wedding dress can be altered into a party dress by cutting it shorter and dyeing it yellow. Likewise, a verb can be altered by adding the suffix "-ing." In both cases, there is a change in function: the wedding dress starts going to parties, and the verb begins acting like an adjective. How is this possible? Observe:

The duke stood up. He accepted the challenge.
Standing, the duke accepted the challenge.

In this example, the "-ing" turns the verb **stood** into a modifier for the verb and effortlessly eliminates the whole first sentence. Not bad, for one little three-letter suffix. Here's another example:

My cousin and I had a great time that afternoon. We
played Double Dare on our skateboards.
My cousin and I had a great time that afternoon **playing**
Double Dare on our skateboards.

Participles often collect words in a **participial phrase**. To say more about the brave duke, we could show where he was:

Standing in the doorway, the duke accepted the
challenge.

But beware: participial phrases are modifiers, and their position in the sentence is important. What's wrong with these two sentences?

Eddie had a wonderful view of the Canadian Rockies
riding in the observation car.

The maidens of Israel came out to meet David and Saul
singing their triumphant song.

Who were singing, the maidens or the men? Is Eddie or the Rockies getting a ride in the observation car? Because participles usually tell how, where or when the

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subject did something, they should be placed near the subject. Rewrite the two sentences above to make it clearer who is doing what.

EXERCISE 4-A

Now you know several ways to **combine** and **connect** sentences.

Connections:

Coordinating conjunctions:

and, but, or, for

Subordinating conjunctions

while, when, since, if, etc.

Semicolons and dashes

Combinations:

Relative clauses

who, which, that

Participles

Participial phrases

Commas

(If you are lost at this point, go back and review pp. 33-35.)

Rewrite each of the following sentences *twice*, first as a **connection** and then as a **combination**. In each case, mark the version you prefer. Use each of the above methods *at least twice* in the course of the entire exercise.

EXAMPLES:

- (A) Dotti sang beautifully. She thrilled us all.
Dotti sang beautifully, and thrilled us all. (connect.)
Singing beautifully, Dotti thrilled us all. (comb.)
- (B) My uncle does leatherwork. He gave me this belt.
My uncle does leatherwork, so he gave me this belt.
(connect.)
My uncle, who does leatherwork, gave me this belt.
(comb.)

1. Hester arrived late at choir practice. She apologized to the director.

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2. Blaine stood up to speak next. He talked for twenty minutes on "Raising Night Crawlers."

3. Horses are beautiful animals. They are often celebrated in art and poetry.

4. Joyce Kilmer wrote a famous poem called "Trees." He died in World War I.

5. My mother was once a professional dancer. She danced the lead role in "Swan Lake."

6. Josh put a finger to his lips. He tiptoed across the room and out to the balcony.

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7. The boy stood on the deck. We waved to signal him.

8. It started to rain. Sally rushed outside to take the clothes off the line.

9. Water reflects a face. A man's heart reflects the man.
(Prov. 27:19)

10. Mr. Hennessy showed us the cup. He said it once belonged to King George III.

Although we've done a lot of connecting work, don't forget that not all sentences need to be connected. Short sentences have a purpose. They are forceful. They get your attention. Longer sentences, on the other hand, create flow and rhythm for the writer's thoughts to move gracefully to a conclusion.

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EXERCISE 4-B

Short and long sentences together make an agreeable blend, a lesson that some advertising writers should learn. Does the following sound familiar?

Comfort. Serenity. That's what you've worked for all your life. Now it's time to enjoy what you deserve. Mammon Springs is your next stop. A unique retirement community nestled in the Florida Everglades. A relaxed, informal lifestyle to suit your golden years. Call us. We have a lot for you.

Underline each fragment in the above paragraph (and be careful--just because it's short doesn't mean it's a fragment). Then, decide which sentences or fragments you will combine, keeping in mind that the ones you judge to be most important should be kept short. Rewrite the paragraph, eliminating all fragments and restructuring sentences to read more smoothly.

EXERCISE 4-C

Here's the same challenge in reverse: the paragraph below contains only three sentences. How would you *shorten*, rather than lengthen them? Rewrite the paragraph so that it retains all the information but becomes much easier to read.

On the second day of our vacation it was really hot and the air conditioner in our car wasn't working too well, so we had rolled down the windows and let ourselves be blasted by the wind all afternoon. Right after lunch everybody started getting on each other's nerves and Dad kept threatening to stop the car and let us walk, until finally we passed the Brownsville City Limits sign and started watching for the first motel that didn't look too expensive but had a pool. Within an hour we had checked into the OK Korral Lodge, unpacked our suitcases, slipped into our swimsuits, run outside and dived with a glorious splash into the pool, which was spring-fed and felt like ice!

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EXERCISE 4-D

I could say much more about sentences, but it's time you started writing some of your own. As a "final exam" to the first two parts of *Wordsmith*, rewrite these paragraphs, incorporating the tips you've learned about words and sentence structure.

1. After the game we went out for pizza. The pizza restaurant was full of people, all talking and laughing. There were lots of arcade games. We ordered our pizza. Then we played some games. I was high score for that day on one game. They called our number. I went to get our pizza at the window. We ate the pizza, then played some more games. It was fun, except when one kid put his elbow in my eye.
2. It was a nice day. We saw flowers along the sidewalk as we walked along. Children were playing in the park while people sat and watched. There was a little girl riding her bike on the sidewalk. She was coming toward us. She didn't know how to ride very well. "Look out," Dad said, but it was too late. The bicycle ran into the person in front of us and knocked him down.
3. [Write another descriptive paragraph, this time telling what your "ideal room" would look like if you had permission to design one, and all the money you needed. Shift your imagination to "high" and spare none of the lavish details!]

SUMMARY OF PART TWO

Let's review what you've learned about sentences:

1. Every sentence has a subject and a predicate. The subject is usually a noun or pronoun, and the predicate contains either a linking verb, an action verb, or an action verb with an auxiliary.
2. Every sentence must express a complete thought. Fragments are unlawful in this course.
3. Sentences may be transformed by manipulating and/or changing the subject and the verb.
4. "There is" and "It has" are, for beginning writers, undesirable sentence openers.
5. In active voice the subject is doing the action. In passive voice the subject is receiving the action. In most cases, active voice is stronger.
6. Short, related sentences may be connected by a coordinating conjunction, a subordinating conjunction, or a semicolon.
7. In order to combine sentences it is necessary to change one of the sentences, either by removing the subject or predicate or by altering the verb to a participial.
8. Long sentences "flow" well, but short sentences are more forceful.

PART THREE - *NOW WE'RE WRITING!*

You have something to say. I don't care how many times you've sat at a desk with a pencil in your hand and a mind as blank as the paper in front of you--I still insist that you have something to say.

Do you think you never go anywhere or do anything interesting? What would you think of a girl who grew up in the same house, never moved, never went on vacation, never had more than a few friends, never married, and died at age 56? It would be hard to imagine a more boring life. But Emily Dickinson wrote over a thousand poems during her "boring" life, which are still read and enjoyed (and required for every American literature student) today. Here's one:

The sky is low, the clouds are mean;
A traveling flake of snow
Across a barn or thorn or rut
Debates if it will go.

A narrow wind complains all day
How some one treated him.
Nature, like us, is sometimes caught
Without her diadem.

This example demonstrates how a poet can take the simple, ordinary experiences of life and make them special.

You may never be a great poet, but you have *lots* of simple, ordinary experiences. Sometimes you even have extraordinary experiences that would have stunned Emily Dickinson. Your life is full of material, and you are the only one who can communicate it. You may not be the only one to have raised a baby lamb or gone whitewater rafting or spent your vacation penguin-sighting in Antarctica--*but*, because God made you to be one of a kind, you will experience your life in a unique way. Because you are *you*, and not somebody else, you will see and feel life a little differently.

Some authors keep a journal in which to write their impressions of daily events--impressions which later find their way into novels and stories. You may be thinking, "That's great, but I don't have the slightest urge to write a novel or a story. I just want to get through this book, and I still don't know what to write about!"

Stop worrying; I'll tell you what to write about. You may even have so much fun you'll forget how worried you were.

1. EXPLORING SENSORY EXPERIENCE

You receive information the same way everybody else does--through the senses. What you see, hear, smell, feel and taste affect what you think. Can you ever hear sleigh bells without thinking of Christmas? Sparkling tinsel, the sharp scent of pine, warm gingerbread cookies, and smooth red ribbon are all things that say "Christmas" to most of us.

Try an experiment. On the lines below, write something about Christmas that relates to each of the five senses. Try to think of at least one descriptive adjective to go with each, like *smooth* red ribbon, or *sparkling* tinsel.

Christmas:

_____	(sight)
_____	(sound)
_____	(touch)
_____	(taste)
_____	(smell)

Merry Christmas!

Do you know what you've just done? You've written a poem!

Your poem doesn't rhyme, but poetry and rhyme aren't necessarily the same thing. In fact, the poetry you'll be writing in this section will almost certainly be better if it *doesn't* rhyme. The reason is, that while you're busy thinking, "Ummmm, 'plink,' 'pink,' 'sink,' 'stink'..." you may overlook the very words that would best express your feelings. I have only one rule for poetry:

**Poetry is the process
of choosing the words to say
just what you want to say
in just enough space.**

Poetry, more than any other kind of writing, deals with feelings and impressions. This is where your senses come in.

1-A. Think of your favorite season of the year: winter, spring, summer or fall. Each season has its own character, its own holidays, smells, sounds, things to do. Take a piece of blank notebook paper, and write a poem about the season you like best. Don't let the assignment scare you--just use the model of your Christmas poem. That is, write the name of the season on the first line, write an impression from this season for each of the five senses, and end with the name again, modified by a descriptive adjective that sums up the whole season for you.

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Do you like what you've done? Ask two people--a parent and a friend, for example--to read your poem and tell you if the words you chose suggest the season to them. You may want to change a line or two, or think harder about a particular taste or smell. When your poem is perfect (or as perfect as you can make it), copy it over neatly.

1-B. If that was fun, write similar poems about the other three seasons. Ponder them, correct them, and copy them on good-quality paper. Bound together in a booklet, with illustrations, your original poetry would make a priceless, one-of-a-kind gift for somebody close to you (and it wouldn't cost much!).

1-C. Now for a challenge. Try writing a poem about a color, describing how that color would taste, smell, sound and feel. Here's an example:

Purple looks rich, like a king's robe.
Purple feels soft and smooth as velvet.
Purple smells dark and sweet as violets.
Purple sounds like the mellow notes of a French horn.
Purple tastes dark and wild as blackberries.

If purple doesn't appeal to you, think of robin's-egg blue, or vermillion, or ocre. Think about two or three colors, and write poems comparing how they would taste or smell. Follow the pattern given above, or use your own pattern.

A collection of color poems would make an attractive little booklet, too. Maybe Emily Dickinson got started this way.

Poetry is such a wide subject I would have to write another book to do justice to it. I'll just say here that poetry can be about anything and take any form. The best way to understand what poetry is, is to read it. On pages 88-89 you'll find some poems written by young people ages 10-15. Read them carefully, and notice how *all* of the senses are involved. Some of the poems have an obvious pattern; others don't.

1-D. Read these poems, then try writing at least one more. You might want to describe a favorite place, a holiday, a sports activity, a parade, a painting or picture, or *anything* that can be explored through all the senses. Make sure that you include at least one sensory image per line. Read your poem several times, and judge whether it says what you want to say. Make corrections, then copy it neatly.

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2. FIGURES OF SPEECH

Look at the words "sensory image" in the last paragraph of Section 1. What's your idea of an "image"? An idol? A statue? A reflection in a mirror or pond? A "word image" is a single impression, a picture drawn in words. The poems you wrote contained a number of smells, sounds and textures that made impressions--"footprints"--on a reader's mind. You recalled several concrete, specific things to express your feelings about summer, Christmas, or whatever. These things were not in front of your eyes or within your grasp when you wrote about them. You *imagined*, then *expressed* them in words. They were **literal images**--word pictures of real things.

All written images are word pictures drawn on the mind, to help the reader understand what the author means. Literal images do this by referring to sensory details. **Figurative images** accomplish the same purpose by comparing one thing to another. We call these "Figures of Speech."

Often the comparison is one the reader never thought of before, and the surprise of it will startle him or her into fresh insights. I've used several comparisons in this book. In the introduction, I suggested that painting a picture could be compared to writing a story. This was an extended figure of speech to help you see that the thought processes which precede both are much the same, even though the results are different.

The most obvious type of comparison is a **simile**, in which the comparison is signalled by the word "like" or "as."

Jed went limp **as a noodle**.
Mary whistles **like a teakettle** when she's nervous.

On page 18, I compared prepositional phrases to little word trains; the preposition, you may recall, was *like* an engine that could pull its "cars" (words) around the sentence.

2-A. Some similes have become so common they are **cliches** (pronounced cli-SHAYS). "Ran like a rabbit," "flat as a pancake," "dead as a doornail" are so overused they have lost their power to startle. We no longer wonder what makes a doornail dead, or whether pancakes are all that flat. Fresh similes are hard to come by in conversation--few of us can think that fast--but a writer has time to capture the perfect comparison.

Many of the examples below are so workworn that a cliché will immediately jump to mind. Don't use it! See if you can think of something else that's heavy besides lead, or white instead of snow. Before filling in any blanks, you may wish to make copies of this page and ask several friends and family members to write their own similes. It's fun to compare the comparisons.

- | | |
|-------------------|-------------------|
| 1. Light as _____ | 4. Quick as _____ |
| 2. Heavy as _____ | 5. Cold as _____ |
| 3. Slow as _____ | 6. Hot as _____ |

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7. Flat as _____ 9. Hard as _____
8. White as _____ 10. Green as _____

Now try these:

1. Janice ran like _____
2. His smile shone like _____
3. Pearce grinned like _____
4. The captain stood like _____
5. Mrs. Blake screamed like _____

Metaphors are sometimes harder to spot than similes because they don't make use of those telling little words "like" or "as." In a metaphor, one thing is compared to another as if it actually were the other. On page 17 I referred to nouns and verbs as the "meat and potatoes" of language; this is an example of metaphor. Jesus said, "I *am* the Light of the world," not, "I am *like* the light of the world." On a more negative note, General Sherman said, "War is hell," and not, "War is really a whole lot like hell, you know?" From these examples, you should detect that a metaphor is often a more powerful statement than a simile.

Have you ever tried to describe an abstract concept, such as "justice," "misery," or "joy"? Metaphor lends itself well to this type of exercise. Notice how this fourteen-year-old uses metaphors to define happiness:

Happiness is hearing that you got the job, after
days of anticipation.
Happiness is holding a baby and knowing that it's
smiling at you.
Happiness is finally being able to open a
container that you haven't been able to for
weeks.
Happiness is being with one of your best friends.

2-B. Choose two of the following: **joy, peace, depression, excitement, love, justice, disappointment, satisfaction, faith, sorrow.** Define each of these concepts with at least four metaphors, as in the example about happiness, above.

Such expressions as "Eleanor's face clouded" and "Harvey flew past the judges' stand" are metaphors in shorthand. They make use of a verb to imply that the subject is doing something it can't actually do. We know Harvey can't fly, but we accept the statement as a comparison between his great speed and flight.

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Personification is a type of metaphor that compares an animal or object to a human being. Remember the word "person" in personification and you won't forget what that fifty-dollar word means. Look at the Poem on p. 42 and notice how Emily Dickinson personifies the wind by picturing it as a sniveling griper. What other personification can you spot in the poem? What is personified in poem #5 on p. 89?

2-C. A personification may be short and fleeting, or long and involved. Here are a couple of short ones. Notice how the verb almost single-handedly creates the image in each sentence:

A single elm tree stood sentinel in the back yard.
The tractor coughed tiredly, then died.

Think about the everyday objects listed below, then apply actions to them that are usually performed by humans. Use the verb list if you need ideas.

1. The telephone _____
2. The washing machine _____

3. The daffodils _____

Now locate some objects around the house or neighborhood to personify. This is easier if you choose things that make noise or move in some way.

4. _____

5. _____

6. _____

2-D. Another way to experiment with personification is to imagine that you are an inanimate object. Write a short poem entitled "I Am the Wind." In your poem tell what you do and how you feel, using verbs that are usually applied to human beings. If you like, you may use this format, or one of your own devising:

EXAMPLE:

I am the night.
I prowls softly through the silent streets,
Brushing against closed windows.

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No one knows my name because
I never tell.

I am the wind.

(mention two
specific ac-
tions you do)

(tell how you
feel about
it, and why)

That's simple enough. Write at least two more poems, choosing as your subject a natural phenomenon, an inanimate or mechanical object, or an animal.

3. SPECIAL PLACES

When I was growing up, I used to look forward to going downtown with my sisters to see a movie. After a forty-five minute bus trip, during which the houses and trees of the suburbs gave way to concrete and skyscrapers, we stepped down into the diesel fumes and bustling sidewalks of the city. Our destination was one of the four downtown theaters. Admission was thirty-five cents for me, at least until I turned twelve. Once inside, away from the roar of city traffic, I was in another world.

The theaters sported names like "The Palace" and "The Majestic" and, though decorating schemes varied, all relied on lots of mirrors and carved wood, gilded plaster, dark velvets, and wide curving staircases to create an opulent atmosphere. But each lobby smelled like movie theaters everywhere--a heavy mixture of cigarette smoke and buttered popcorn.

My favorite place was the balcony where, waiting for the movie to start, I rocked my squeaky, velvet-upholstered chair back and forth.

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The domed ceiling of the Majestic rose so high I could make myself dizzy staring up into it. The soft crunch of the popcorn we nibbled while waiting has seemed ever since to be the very taste of anticipation. Finally the dim lights would darken, the projectors hum, the huge heavy curtains roll back from the screen with a whoosh, and the show began.

You know places that seem to rush at you with *feelings*. You walk into the dentist's office and the butterflies start up a flutter in your stomach, even if you've only come to pay a bill. The gym where you practice basketball makes you tingle with a mixture of anxiety and excitement. The oak tree in your back yard wraps you in peace and contentment every time you climb up in it. These places, at least for you, are loaded with associations, with pleasant or unpleasant memories. Every time you smell novocaine or hear the slap of a basketball on a hardwood floor, some of those associations come back.

3-A. Read my description of the movie theater again. I retain emotional memories of places like the Majestic because I visited them for one purpose only: to see movies. As such, they were places of anticipation, excitement, and escape from the everyday world. You may have noticed that the description is full of detail, and all of the details are sensory impressions. Write some of these details in the chart below. You should find at least one item to go in each column.

Sight	Sound	Smell	Touch	Taste

Our five senses are windows to the outside world. Everything we know comes in through the senses and is processed through the brain. Your mind determines what you notice and what you remember and how you feel about it, but the information itself is the same for everyone. You know what popcorn tastes like. You may also understand the difference between home-popped popcorn and the slightly soft, over-salted, bright yellow variety sold in movie theaters. If you do, you've shared part of my childhood movie-going experience. By mentioning the popcorn, I've opened a window between my experience and yours, and that's where we meet. Because we connect over the popcorn, you can (I hope) read the rest of my description with interest because it has something to do with experiences familiar to you.

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Suppose I had written this instead:

When I was growing up during the early sixties, going downtown to see a movie was a special Saturday treat. The theaters were much larger and more ornate than they are today. Even though television, still fairly new at the time, was supposed to be a threat to the motion picture industry, plenty of patrons attended the old-time movie theaters. Thirty-five cents was the price of admission for children under twelve, unless the feature was a special engagement--a "blockbuster" like Ben-Hur, for example. Then the price might be as high as fifty or seventy-five cents.

The above is a perfectly good paragraph, and if I were writing a report for school it might even get an "A." But it does not communicate any *feeling* of place to the reader. One reason it doesn't is because I took myself and my impressions out of the paragraph. For another, I included no literal images--nothing to touch or smell. The paragraph may have interest for someone who enjoys reading about the sixties, about movies, or about low prices in the "old days," but it has no **emotional appeal**.

That's why the senses are so important in creative writing. It is through the senses that you can "reach out and touch" your reader, even if your reader never met you personally.

Take a moment to look back at the Emily Dickinson poem on p. 42. We understand at once that she's describing a cold, gray winter day, but it may surprise you to realize that she never uses the words "cold," "gray" or "winter" at all! Instead, the details she chooses to mention make us feel the "winterness" of her poem.

3-B. Refer to examples #7 and #8 (p. 90) for two descriptions by students your age, then think of a place that has particular and specific associations for you. Often the place affects you most at certain times or seasons--your kitchen on baking days, the church sanctuary at Christmas Eve service, the softball field during a night game. Think about the things you see there, the sounds you hear, the smells you smell, the textures you feel. List as many as you can think of (at least one per category) on the chart on the following page:

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Place: _____

Time of day: _____

Season: _____

Sights	Sounds	Smells	Textures	Tastes

"Taste" is a hard one, unless you happen to be writing about a restaurant. But keep in mind that you don't have to put anything in your mouth in order to taste it. Fear or nervousness can be tasted in a dry, prickly throat. Dust, rain or snow have distinctive tastes. Some smells are so powerful they almost register on your tongue. If you're a gum-chewer, the place that you're describing might be one where you typically chew gum. Think about it, and see if you can't put anything in that "taste" column before giving up.

ASSIGNMENT 3-C. Write a description of a special place, double-spaced, following these guidelines:

- Use some details from each of the five categories.
- Use specific nouns for naming things.
- Tell where the place is, what time of day it is and, if outdoors, what time of year.
- Avoid "it has" and "there is."
- Tell what your feelings are when you are in this place.

If you were able to fill your chart with details, you don't have to use all of them. Select the ones that mean most to you and are consistent with these guidelines. Your description could easily run to two double-spaced pages--don't try to cut it short. And **DON'T WORRY ABOUT SPELLING EVERYTHING CORRECTLY.** Spelling is important, but not for the first draft. Stopping to look up a word could halt your flow of ideas.

When you finish the assignment, go back and read it through. Check and correct any spelling errors you catch (look up the ones you're not sure of), then check to see that all the guidelines are included. Put your paper aside.

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If at least 24 hours have passed since you looked at your description, it will seem fresh to you when you read it again--perhaps you can even forget who wrote it. Now we're ready to do some revision.

Revision is the process of rereading and rewriting your material. At this stage you will determine what's wrong and how to fix it. Something *will* be wrong. I've written plays, stories, magazine articles, even a couple of full-length novels, and I still don't expect to write a perfect copy the first time. After writing this book out in longhand, I put it through five revisions on the computer because I kept finding places where improvements could be made. Some writers *hate* revising, and some (like me) don't mind it, but anybody who writes anything must learn to revise.

Now that that's settled, look at page 86 and "Revision Checklist #1." This is a list of questions you should ask yourself about your work. Read the list first, then carefully read your description. Did you follow the guidelines? Could more be added, or anything taken away? Change anything that needs changing. Because you double-spaced, you will have plenty of room to write in corrections where they're needed.

When the description is as correct and complete as you can make it, copy it neatly, single-spaced this time. Then read it out loud once more, to yourself or to someone else. How does it sound now? If you think it could be a whole lot better but can't figure out how, don't be discouraged. If you keep writing, and keep trying, you will improve. That's a promise.

Now that you've completed your first real assignment, let me remind you how you did it. First, you **thought** about a place. Then you **organized** your thoughts by writing some of your impressions on the chart. Once you had some details to work with, you **wrote** the description, and the assignment was complete, right? **WRONG!** I pointed out to you that no writer writes it right the first time. I asked you to wait a day, then read your paper again and **evaluate** it against the revision checklist. You made corrections in the original draft, then **rewrote** it.

All these steps make up the Writing TOWER, a process which *every* writer goes through with every project:



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Writers who are serious about their work are "TOWERERERERs" because they evaluate and rewrite many, many times. Every "ASSIGNMENT" in this book is to be TOWERed. Are you ready? Here's another one.

ASSIGNMENT 3-D. Rewrite your description, but this time build some suspense and don't tell where you are until the last sentence. You may use all or most of the same details, but you will have to rearrange some thoughts and possibly use different words to make your place sound mysterious. The last sentence will be the "punchline," but by then you should have included enough clues that the reader will begin to get some idea where you are. Look at Example #9 on p. 90 to see how one 14-year-old did this.

ASSIGNMENT 3-E. Write at least one more full-page description. Make a chart and use the same guidelines as you did with the first assignment, but this time, don't use the words "I see," "I hear," or "I feel". Think of other ways to express your sensory impressions, like, "I shiver in the cool air," or "Laughter surrounds me." Remember some of your sentence restructuring techniques from Part Two. The suggestions below may help you think of a good place to describe.

your grandparents' house
your back yard in the fall or spring
the roller skating rink
your piano teacher's house
the weight room at the "Y"
a nursing home
the atrium at the mall
the swimming pool at 2:00 p.m. on a summer afternoon

JUST IMAGINE: Now write a description of any place on this planet or off--so long as you've *never* been there. You may wish to use a picture in a magazine or book to help in describing what you see, but remember that you'll also have to tell what you hear, smell, and touch or taste *and* the emotions you experience. Make a chart first, then write, using the guidelines on p. 51 and your own imagination.

4. DESCRIBING A PERSON

When I asked you to write a description, I didn't ask you to limit what you wrote (beyond the mild suggestion that you might not want to record everything you see in a given place). But from now on you'll have to give some thought to what *not* to write. This may not seem to be a problem to you, if it's all you can do to fill one double-spaced page. But one of the most important things a writer must learn is to set limits.

Find a piece of lightweight cardboard roughly the size of this page and cut out the middle so that it resembles a picture frame. Now, in the schoolroom, bedroom, back yard or wherever you happen to be, hold the frame at arm's length and center it on one object or view. What does the frame do?

The frame brings a picture into focus by blocking out everything around it. It helps you to concentrate on one object, one area.

TRY IT: Prop your frame up on the table or desk or window sill so that you can see through it while your hands are free. Now write a short description (about 4-6 sentences) of what you can see through the frame. Describe colors, textures and sizes and make your nouns as specific as possible. Don't hesitate to use "action" verbs, such as sit, stand, squat, sprawl--even if the object doesn't seem to be doing anything.

* * * * *

The previous exercise was supposed to help you concentrate on one object. Now we'll try to concentrate on one especially fascinating "object"--a human being.

ASSIGNMENT 4-A. If you are a human being, start with yourself. Get a small hand mirror, or move your operations temporarily to the bathroom. A mirror, unless it's a huge one that covers a whole wall, acts as a frame to bring one person into focus. Spend a few minutes just looking at your reflection. Try to be as objective as possible --that is, pretend for a moment that the face you see is not yours. It may help to hold the picture frame up to the mirror.

Imagine that you are seeing this face for the first time. Judging from his or her expression, what kind of person do you think this is? Do you see a pleasant, friendly, thoughtful, anxious, serious, or smart-alecky face? Write down one or two adjectives that describe the overall impression you have. Now look carefully, and decide what it is about those features that give you such an impression. Alertness, for example, is often indicated by bright, wide-open eyes. Write down at least two specific features in your face that support your overall impression.

The following was written by a fifteen-year-old:

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There stands a young man with his life yet before him. His well-defined eyebrows over questioning and playful eyes look out at the world with hope and promise. His listening ears are ready to hear. His strong jaw identifies a straight-forward personality, sincere and open.

Did you notice how describing the eyes and jaw in a particular way give us a clue to this young man's character?

Try it yourself--write a one-paragraph description of "The Boy (or Girl) In The Mirror."

Proofread once or twice to catch any misspelled words or punctuation errors, then put your paragraph aside for a day.

Read your paragraph again and return to the mirror. Did you write a good description? What would you change about it? Revise according to Revision Checklist #1 (p. 86), get your teacher to proofread it, then copy it neatly. Paste a photograph of yourself on the page and keep it with your other assignments.

ASSIGNMENT 4-B. Think about someone on TV who appears regularly "as himself" or "as herself"--a news reporter, a game show hostess, a used car salesman or furniture dealer. (If you don't have a television don't feel bad--neither do I.) These people are not playing a part in a stage drama but they are, to some extent, acting. They are trying to communicate certain qualities that they want the viewing public to believe about them. The news anchor: serious and trustworthy. The sports reporter: upbeat and chatty. The game show host: witty and charming. The game show hostess: poised and glamorous. The used car salesman: mentally unbalanced.

Choose one such person on TV to describe in a paragraph. If you don't happen to have a TV, describe a person that you often see in a public capacity, such as your pastor when preaching a sermon. But don't try to say everything there is to say about him or her. **Limit yourself to the one or two qualities of this person that seem clearest to you.**

Now, observe carefully: what is it about the person that gives you the impression you have? What does he or she do with shoulders, mouth, hands, eyebrows or voice to create the character he or she seems to be?

In Section 3, you made a chart of sensory impressions to use while writing your description. This time I want you to make a **guidesheet** to help you organize your thoughts. This process will be the same for most of the following assignments, so pay attention. On a clean sheet of paper, write brief answers to each of the following questions:

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- a. What is the most striking impression you have of this person?
- b. List at least two things the person does to give you that impression.
- c. What details of the person's appearance (hairstyle, posture, facial expression) support your impression?
- d. What does the person say in one direct quote? How does he or she say it?
- e. How do the person's clothes support your impression?
- f. Where is this person? What's the most prominent feature of the background?

Here's an example of a guidesheet and the resulting description:

- a. glamorous and glittering; "Isn't life beautiful?"
- b. caresses car, responds to audience applause
- c. dazzling smile, shiny pink nails, sleek hair
- d. "A stunning 1991 Crysler LeBaron Convertible!" she announces (promises? proclaims? exclaims?)
- e. blue sequined gown, three-inch heels, diamond earrings
- f. TV sound stage, new car, "Trust Your Luck" sign outlined in flashing lights

Lawanna Dale poses in front of the gleaming sports car and announces the grand prize: "A stunning new Crysler LeBaron Convertible!" The audience applauds and cheers as Lawanna's fingers, tipped with shiny pink nails, slide along the satiny finish of the car. Her smile is as dazzling as her blue sequined gown. On three-inch heels, she saunters the length of the car and pauses by the rear bumper, her right hand extended and her mouth slightly open as if she were about to say, "Isn't life beautiful?"

Notice that I didn't include all the details on the guidesheet, only the ones that seemed to contribute most to my view of this particular person.

Now make your own guidesheet, answering questions **a-f**. Then write your paragraph, double-spaced; proofread for spelling and punctuation errors and put it aside for a day.

Reread your paragraph, correct according to Checklist #1 on p. 86 and copy it neatly.

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ASSIGNMENT 4-C. Now, rewrite the paragraph describing the same person, but in a different way. Beside letter "a" on your guidesheet, answer this question: "What **animal** does this person remind you of?" If he or she doesn't remind you of an animal at all, then look at him or her carefully and try to imagine a beaver, toad, bull dog, lynx, or other creature in the same place, doing the same things. Answer questions **b-f** in the light of this comparison. Lawanna Dale, for instance, reminds me of a cheetah.

Lawanna Dale poses in front of the gleaming sports car, her sleek tail twitching. "A stunning new Crysler LeBaron Convertible!" she purrs. The audience applauds and cheers as Lawanna's shiny pink claws make a languid swipe at the LeBaron, leaving three-inch scratches on its satiny finish. She slinks along the car and pauses by the rear bumper, combing her long, elegant whiskers and smiling as if to say, "Isn't life beautiful?"

Remember to:

T HINK
O RGANIZE
W RITE
E VALUATE
R EWRITE

I asked you to describe someone on television because the TV screen acts as a frame to isolate one picture, even though the picture is always changing. The people you live with are often hardest to describe because you know too much about them and could hardly write it all. I'm going to ask you, however, to write about someone in your own family by putting an imaginary "frame" around him or her at a given moment.

Compare these two descriptions, both written by ten-year-olds:

I. My dad is wearing a pair of blue jeans and a yellow shirt. My dad is six feet tall and very strong. He also has blond hair. He is slouching in his chair because he is very tired. But he is happy. He is sitting in a big room with lots of plants and a big fish tank with a huge fish.

II. My mom was having a very bad day. She kept making strange faces, but she didn't mean to. I asked a question and she yelled at me, "Quit talking and do your work!" Then my sister came in and started jabbering. My mom said to her, "Go

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upstairs right now!" My sister left immediately. I wanted to cry, but I know my mom didn't mean to be angry at me.

The first paragraph tells too much in some ways and leaves too much out in others. We can get some idea of what the man looks like and "slouching" is an effective verb to express his tiredness, but how can we see that he's happy? It's possible to be both tired and happy, but the writer should *show* the happiness by the facial expression or an action or direct quote from Dad. Saying something about the room is a good idea but, remembering our picture frame, it would be better to concentrate on the part of the room where the man is sitting.

The second paragraph concentrates on the person in a particular mood. Without saying that her mother was angry (until the end) the writer communicates anger by showing what Mom did and said. Because of a narrow focus, the second paragraph succeeds better than the first at sharp description.

ASSIGNMENT 4-D. Describe anyone in your household. If possible, write the description (or at least make some notes) while you are in the same room with the person. However, he or she should not be aware that you're writing about them--that tends to make people self-conscious and it's hard for them to act natural.

On your guidesheet, answer questions **a-f** on p. 56. Pinpointing the most striking impression about your subject will probably be more difficult than it was when writing about a TV personality, because an individual who is not aware of being watched is usually not trying to make an impression.

Two tips will make this assignment easier: First, describe this person when he or she is occupied in a specific activity, such as talking on the telephone, putting your little sister to bed, playing with the dog. Second, try to determine what mood your subject is in (cheerful? contented? irritated? anxious?) and focus on the mannerisms that convey that mood. Look at eyebrows, mouth, hands, back. Remember how strong verbs and descriptive adjectives can help you.

Think, Organize, Write. Then proofread and put the description aside for a day or two.

Read the description to yourself and Evaluate according to Revision Checklist #1 (p. 86) Once the paper is revised to your satisfaction, read it aloud to someone who knows the person you described. If you have a large household, it would be fun to ask your listener to guess who the person is. He or she may even have some suggestions to make ("But remember how Dad always blows through his nose when he's irritated?"). Don't be too proud to incorporate a good suggestion into your paper! Rewrite the description neatly and add it to your completed assignments.

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ASSIGNMENT 4-E. Following the TOWER steps, write a similar description of another person, either a family member or a close friend. See example #10 on p. 90 for an unusual description of a friend.

* * * * *

JUST IMAGINE: Suppose you could dream up your ideal friend, brother, sister or teacher. What would he or she be like? Perfect, of course, but what's your idea of perfect? Imagine and describe a **composite** character--that is, an imaginary person who contains characteristics of people you actually know--Todd's sense of humor without Todd's temper, for instance. Shirley's sensitivity, Dad's wisdom, Mom's sense of fun, Stephen's spirit of adventure. Describe this ideal person involved in some type of activity, and show at least two specific personality traits (such as kindness, patience, or a sense of humor) *by what the person does*.

* * * * *

5. NARRATIVE WRITING I - SEQUENCE AND DETAIL

Do you know how to tell a story? Just put one event after another until the story is told, right? Basically this is correct, but story-telling is much more than a series of events, and sometimes even relating events isn't so easy.

Sequence is an ordered series, such as the steps in a dance or a game:

Two people can play checkers. First each player chooses a color--either red or black. Then the checkers are arranged on opposite sides of the board, with all the pieces of each color lined up in three rows on the red squares only. The "red" player has the first turn. To start the game, he may move any checker on the row nearest the center to one of the red spaces nearest to it . . .

TRY IT: To get an idea of how well you handle sequence, write a paragraph explaining how to make your favorite sandwich. You may dream up any delightful concoction you wish, but your sandwich must contain bread and at least two other ingredients that can usually be found in the kitchen. Your paragraph should describe the steps in order, leaving out nothing that's important to the recipe. Write it now.

* * * * *

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Was that easy, or did you have to think about it? Did you have the sandwich together before you put on the mustard? Did the caviar end up on the outside? Did you cut the sandwich in neat quarters and stab each quarter with a toothpick, only to find that half the bread was missing? Read carefully through your paragraph again and make sure the steps are in order. If you were to give this recipe to your mother, could she follow your directions to make the sandwich for you?

One other thing: how many times did you use the word "then"? If more than once, it's probably too many. For variety's sake, consider other ways to convey a sense of sequential action, such as "Next," "After I spread the mayonnaise," "Once the pickle relish is on," etc.

ASSIGNMENT 5-A. Think of one of the chores you do around the house. Imagine that you're going to be gone for a few days and someone else will have to do this job for you, someone who's never done it before. Organize your thoughts by writing the steps in sequence, from the preparation (getting out any needed tools), to the procedure, and all the way through to cleaning up afterward. Write out a thorough and clear description of the job, and try to avoid using the word "then" more than once.

* * * * *

Now read your paragraph carefully and correct any errors. Did you name all objects with specific nouns? Did you use strong verbs to describe your actions? Most important, could anyone complete this job by following your directions? Make a final copy and, as an experiment, trade jobs with a family member to see how easily he or she can complete the task working *only* from your written directions.

JUST IMAGINE: Think of a job you've never done but would like to do. Or make up a job that doesn't exist, like farming subplanetary fungi on Mars. Think carefully about what this chore would involve, and write out all the steps. Then write a paragraph explaining how to do it. Include details of the work environment and give some idea of how you would feel when doing this job.

* * * * *

By now you should have a clear idea of sequence and its importance. But, as I said earlier, sequence isn't everything. The following is a sequence--

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I. One evening last summer I went to the county fair. First I bought a candy apple and walked up and down the Midway trying to decide what to ride. I finally settled on the ferris wheel, then I went to ride the roller coaster. That was so much fun I went on the roller coaster again, and then I went home.

--but it isn't very interesting. Compare the paragraph you just read with this one:

II. Dazzled by the noise and music and colored lights, I crunched into the shiny jacket of my candy apple as I strolled down the Midway of the Clark County Fair. "Hey, kid!" came a voice from the arcade on my right. "Try your luck in the duck shoot. Three shots a quarter!" I just shook my head and wandered on, fingering the change in my pocket. It was less than two dollars, enough for only three rides--but which ones? I walked the whole Midway twice, changing my mind again and again, as my indecision became so sharp the candy apple almost lost its sweetness.

What makes the second paragraph more interesting than the first? It contains some of the same information, but it also puts you, the reader, right on the Midway--offers you a candy apple, shows you the gaudy lights, lets you feel the loose change and the agony of indecision. Did you notice how all the senses were involved? From such details, could you connect this paragraph with an experience you may have had at a carnival or amusement park?

ASSIGNMENT 5-B. Think of something that happened to you in the last week. It doesn't have to be anything special, just something you remember: a shopping trip, a bus ride, a conversation over breakfast. As you organize your thoughts, write answers to these questions:

- a. Where were you, and what were you doing?
- b. What was the sequence of events?
- c. What did you hear? smell? touch? taste?
- d. What did someone say? (If you don't remember the person's exact words, make them up.)

Got it? Write it! Be sure to proofread and correct when you're done.

6. NARRATIVE WRITING II - FOCUS

An important element of every painting is **composition**, the way the artist arranges forms on canvas. Think back to *Washington Crossing the Delaware*. Without looking at the painting, can you remember what the main object of interest is? If you said "Washington," that shows how well the painter did his job. (If you did not, perhaps you should look at the picture again.)

It may seem obvious to you that Washington would be the center of a picture called *Washington Crossing The Delaware*, but keep in mind that the artist could have chosen to center on the flag or right rear oarsman instead. The way he composed the picture, making Washington the tallest figure in the boat and placing him in the light just a little left of center, makes it impossible for you to miss the point. Part of an artist's job is to narrow the viewer's attention, to emphasize certain forms and play down (or omit) others. A writer can't use such visual aids as a frame, light, color, and perspective, but narrowing the reader's attention is as important to writing as it is to painting.

Turn back to p. 61 and reread the two paragraphs about the county fair. We determined (didn't we?) that the second paragraph succeeded through the use of sensory detail. But the second paragraph, even though it was longer, did not cover the same wide territory as the first. We didn't even get to the first ride!

Think about that as you compare two more accounts:

- I. In January my mother, brother, and I went to Snow Creek Ski Area on their "Learn to Ski for Free Day." I was a little nervous about going because I didn't think I'd ever be a good skier. We had to wait in line for a while to get our lift tickets and equipment, then we went out on the bunny slope.
The first hour was terrible! I kept falling down and it was so hard to get up and keep going. But one of the instructors stopped for a moment and gave me a few pointers. The day improved from that time on, until I'd be finishing one run only to head straight for the lift to try another. By the end of the day I felt like an expert.
- II. The sun is high in the sky as I grab the rope tow at the bottom of the bunny slope. I squeeze my aching hands tighter around the rope as I approach the steep part of the hill--my body's tired, after a day spent learning to ski, but my spirits are up. I mentally mark the spot where I plan to get off and--oh, great! The guy in front of me just fell. This always happens. Somebody always falls down on the rope tow just as I'm about to get off, forcing me to change my plans. Sometimes I'm the one who takes the

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spill. I make a hasty exit and ski out to the middle of the slope. I glance down at Snow Creek Ski Area spread out below me and the hundreds of skiers in colorful jackets, all shapes and sizes. I turn my skis downward, give a little push with the poles, and suddenly I'm flying down the slope at an incredible speed. With my knees bent, my arms out to the side, and my jacket flying out almost straight behind me, I feel like I'm just barely touching the ground. This is the frightening part, as there are so many unwary kids that I could run into. The shouting voices and the hum of the rope tow machine all but disappear as the cold wind against my face blots out everything else. As I approach the line of people waiting to get on the rope tow, miraculously I slow down. As I coast to a stop, a man says, "Whoa, don't run into me!" I grin at him and say, "No way--I'm an expert!"

The first paragraph covers a whole day--it's a **summary** of the main events. The second focuses on just one downhill run during the last half of the day. This is a **narrative**. A narrative is a detailed account of a single event. I won't insult your intelligence by asking which is more interesting. It may surprise you, though, that the second type of paragraph is also more fun to write.

Summaries are useful for condensing large chunks of information. In a story, they help a writer move quickly from one scene to another. But no reader ever got emotionally involved in a summary.

Think of the best vacation you ever had with your family. You could write a summary that gave an overall view of where you went and what you did, but without some specific details, I wouldn't understand how much fun it really was. On the other hand, if you tried to describe your whole vacation in detail you'd wear out both of us. The solution is to choose just one outstanding event of the vacation and describe *that* in detail. **Focus in.** Remember the picture frame? The value of a frame is that it blocks out the surrounding view and lets you examine one area in detail. You must learn to do this in creative writing: "frame" one part of a larger whole to help your reader see it clearly. By "seeing" a small part, he or she will better understand the whole.

TRY IT. Go back to the second paragraph on skiing and notice how the writer manages to inform us where she is in just a few words. **Underline** the sentences or phrases that fill us in on the background--where she is, what time of day it is, what she's been doing. The rest of the paragraph tells what the writer saw, heard and felt during one downhill run. **Number** the events that make up the action; **circle** the sensory impressions.

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ASSIGNMENT 6-A. Now it's your turn. Write two or three pages (double-spaced, of course) relating one incident or one special memory of the best vacation you ever had. First, think about it. Then organize your thoughts on a guidesheet, answering these questions:

- a. What is the *single incident* you plan to tell?
- b. Write the events in sequence.
- c. What background information does the reader need to know in order to understand what you're talking about?
- d. What did you see? What did you hear? What did you taste, touch, or smell?
- e. Write one direct quote you remember (if you don't remember the exact words, make them up).

Write your narrative, including many of the details you wrote on your guidesheet. Be sure to use some strong action verbs. Then proofread, make corrections, and set aside.

It's time to get serious about revision. Read "How to Revise" (p. 85), and think about the steps involved. Then read your narrative again. Does it express your memories accurately? Add any *relevant* details that come to you and cross out the words or phrases that don't seem to fit. Complete your revision according to **Checklist #2** on page 86, and put it aside for one more day.

Read your narrative aloud to someone, preferably someone who shared the experience with you. Consider any suggestions your listener makes, and add anything to your paper that would enhance the story, as long as it is relevant to your focus. Finally, copy it neatly. If you have a vacation snapshot, you may want to paste it on your paper as an illustration. Or, if you have a vacation picture album, make a copy of your narrative, cover it with clear contact paper and put it in the album along with the pictures.

ASSIGNMENT 6-B. Sequence, detail, focus. Now that you understand narrative writing, write at least one more narrative. Choose an incident, think about it, and organize your thoughts by writing answers to questions **a-c** on p. 64. You may use any of these ideas, or one of your own:

Write about an incident that happened during a soccer, softball or basketball game.

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Write about a time when you were embarrassed.
Write about a time you felt proud of yourself or of a friend.
Write about something that happened during Sunday School.
Write about a special moment you shared with a grandparent.

JUST IMAGINE. Dream up a moment that never happened, and write about it as if it did. If you have trouble making up a narrative from scratch, then think about something that did happen to you and consider what *might* have happened if the circumstances were different--if Joe hadn't listened to your warning or if your dad missed the plane or if that last-minute reprieve hadn't come. Use the same guidesheet for the imaginary narrative as you did for Assignments 6-A and 6-B and remember to focus on *one* incident. Also,

Remember to TOWER

7. WRITING DIALOGUE

Dialogue is what people say. It's the words printed in the balloons that come out of the mouths of comic strip characters. It's the conversation between actors in a play or a movie. If you've been following instructions so far in this book you've had some experience with direct quotes--the "exact words" spoken by a person. In my opinion, there's nothing like a direct quote to add interest to a story or description.

Direct quotes are the words of one speaker. In **dialogue**, at least two people are speaking and responding to each other. This can go on for a long time. In a play by Shakespeare, it can go on for four hours! When writing dialogue, a playwright has to keep several rules in mind. The dialogue must:

- Advance the story or reveal something about the speaker.
- Be true to the character--what that person would logically say.
- Sound like actual speech, unless there is a good reason why it shouldn't.
- Be relevant to the play's message.

That's a lot to think about, and it is not easy to do. Have you noticed that people don't *talk* the way they write? Suppose a Cub Scout came to your door selling candy bars to raise money for his pack. When you open the door, he says:

"Hello. Cub Scouting offers a unique opportunity for boys ages seven to ten to get together, share learning experiences and practice skills that will help them develop into good citizens. Your support will help

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Pack 93 finance many worthwhile activities and projects throughout the coming year."

Would you suspect a "canned" speech or an alien from the Twilight Zone? Those words, which look just fine on paper, would sound unnatural coming out of the mouth of a ten-year-old. You would, more likely, hear something like this:

"Uh, hi, I'm selling candy bars for my, uh, cub scout pack? Pack 93? You, uh, wanna buy one?"

Writing good dialogue means *listening* to what people say--all kinds of people, in all situations. Think back on an argument or disagreement you recently had with someone. My purpose here is not to dredge up painful memories, but to draw your attention to an actual conversation. Conflict is one of the easiest of human transactions to record on paper, but if you can clearly recall a conversation that was not an argument, you're welcome to think about that instead.

TRY IT: As well as you can remember, write down what was said by you and by the other person. Since you're not likely to remember the exact words, fill in with words that communicate the essence of the conversation--as long as they are words that this speaker is likely to say. Do not, just yet, write any **speech tags**, such as "he said" or "I replied." Record *only* the conversation, as if it were a play. Double-space as usual, and leave plenty of room in the margins to add revisions later.

EXAMPLE:

"Haven't you finished your homework yet?"
"I can't think today."
"You still have a brain, don't you? It's the same brain you've always had, isn't it? Why can't you think?"
"I don't know. I just can't get started."
"I don't understand how you can sit there for two hours and stare at the ceiling while this beautiful day is going to waste outside."
"I can't help it. . . ."

Speech tags are a source of some controversy. You may have read that it's best not to repeat the verb "said" over and over, but to use synonymns. I agree, but only to a point. "Said" can begin to sound repetitious, but synonymns such as "averred," "opined," "stated," etc. can sound pretentious, which is worse. "Averred" and "opined" are never used by anybody except authors who have been told to substitute synonymns for "said." Some successful authors use almost no speech tag except "said," but they use it so skillfully their readers hardly notice it.

My own rule is to avoid speech tags altogether unless they are needed to show who is speaking or to demonstrate a change in mood. Here's what I mean:

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Mom stared at the kitchen floor and sighed.
"Who left these wet clothes here?"
I stopped on my way to the door. "Beats me."

Each character is shown in an action with the quote immediately following. Adding "she said" and "I said" would be acceptable, but it's unnecessary--save the "said's" for when they are needed.

"That's amazing," she said. "It's really amazing how little responsibility there is around here. In a family of grownups you'd think everybody might be responsible for their own clothes at least."
"But Mom, I didn't do it. Honest."

Here the characters aren't doing anything but talking. However, since only two of them are present, it should be clear who the second speaker is. When another person comes on the scene, voices could easily get confused.

Just then my brother Van came in from the garage. "Hi, all," he said.
"Van," demanded Mom, "do you know anything about these wet clothes?"
He glanced at me, his eyes twinkling. "Mark, why did you leave your soccer uniform right here in the floor where people can trip over it?"
"Hey--" I began.
"You're certainly old enough," he added solemnly, "to be responsible for your own clothes."
"You know perfectly well--"
"All right, you two," Mom said. "You both know where the laundry room is. In five minutes I want to see these clothes picked up."

Read over the entire dialogue again and, to the left of each line, indicate who's speaking--Mom, Van, or Mark. Which lines did not use speech tags? Were you ever confused about who was speaking? If so, what would you change?

TRY IT AGAIN: Go back to the dialogue you wrote earlier and think of at least two actions that show what the speaker is doing as he or she talks. (You probably noticed that these actions can also help reveal the mood of the speaker--"Mom sighed," "He glanced at me, his eyes twinkling.") Write in the actions, add any necessary speech tags, read the dialogue again and *listen* to it. Does it sound real? Share it, if you dare, with the other participant in this conversation.

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EXAMPLE:

Mom paused in the doorway, her arms full of laundry. "Haven't you finished your homework yet?"

"I can't think today," I muttered.

"You still have a brain, don't you? It's the same brain you've always had, isn't it? Why can't you think?"

"I don't know. I just can't get started."

She sighed, exasperated. "I don't understand how you can sit there for two hours and"
etc., etc.

Interviews are another way of capturing speech. They take a one-sided approach, in that one speaker is asking all the questions while another is giving all the answers. This differs from the give-and-take of true dialogue, but it's a good way to practice writing direct quotes.

ASSIGNMENT 7-A. Choose someone to interview about a specific topic. If you think you don't know anybody interesting, think again:

Ask a grandparent about his or her reactions to the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor.

Ask your pastor or youth leader what they consider to be the greatest problems facing youth today.

Ask your parents how schools, shopping malls, or entertainment has changed since their time.

Ask your state representative his or her views on education, government spending, or any issue that you're concerned about.

Ask your doctor what he or she believes to be the most serious health problem in America.

Ask your music teacher how he or she became interested in music.

If none of these appeal to you, look around at the people you know. You may be surprised at how many have done something unusual at least once in their lives. Arrange an interview with your chosen subject, then follow these steps:

1. Before the interview, write a list of three to five questions to ask--a good interviewer always does some background work and has an idea of the area he or she wants to cover.

2. Find a comfortable place to conduct the interview, and as your subject answers your questions, write down a short version of what he or she says. That is, only the most important phrases--obviously you can't write fast enough to get it all down. To make it easier on yourself, take a portable tape recorder along. (Even with a recording to transcribe from, it's not a good idea to write down everything your "interviewee" says. Stick to comments that are relevant to the topic.)

3. As your subject answers, try to listen for speech patterns. Few of us talk like a written page, and everybody has a unique way of expressing himself orally. Some say

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"you know" at least five times a minute, others employ "really" as an intensifier for every other adjective. Some have a habit of *emphasizing* every other *word* they *say*. Later, when you write the interview out, you will not be able to reproduce your subject's answers word-for-word, but try to include some of those patterns.

4. As soon as possible, write a draft copy of the interview. Pretend you do not know the subject personally, and write as though you were meeting him or her for the first time. On your guidesheet, answer these questions:

- a. Who is this person? What are the accomplishments or experiences that entitle him or her to talk about the topic at hand?
- b. What is the setting for the interview? What can you hear or smell? If you are in the subject's own home, what details of the area reflect the subject's personality or interests?
- c. What aspects of this person (voice, appearance, facial expression, etc.) make the strongest impression on you?
- d. What actions indicate how the subject feels about the topic?

Questions **a-c** should be answered in an introductory paragraph. Question **d** should be incorporated in the interview. Study how the questions are answered in the following example, then write your first draft of the interview.

EXAMPLE:

Mrs. Simon, known to certain people as "Grandma," was waiting for me in her comfortable, slightly cluttered sunroom. She is an attractive lady with a warm, welcoming smile and gray streaks in her dark hair. Stacks of books and magazines around the room attested to her love of reading. Mrs. Simon recently celebrated her seventieth birthday but her memory is clear and her life has been very full.

"Mrs. Simon," I began, "what is the most vivid memory you have of the depression?"

She looked down at the wrinkled hands in her lap, her eyebrows drawn together in thought. "A black Easter dress."

"Er . . . How's that?"

"A black Easter dress. My mother always made me a dress for Easter, you see, but one year all we had was black goods. That was all. So she made me a dress out of black." Mrs. Simon shook her head ruefully. "I knew she had done her best but I was so ashamed of that dress. . . ."

After you've written your interview, proofread for spelling and grammatical errors, then put aside.

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Reread your interview and make any changes suggested by Revision Checklist #2. Ask someone who knows your subject to read the interview and judge whether you represented that person accurately. If so, copy the paper over neatly and consider including it in a family newsletter or sending it to a homeschool publication.

JUST IMAGINE: If you could talk to anyone in history, fiction, or today's news, whom would it be? What would you ask him or her? Following the steps above, imagine conducting an interview with this person. Write about the experience in 3-4 double-spaced pages.

TOWER Power!

The very best practice for writing dialogue is the radio play. A stage or screenplay writer can use action as well as dialogue to move the story, but a radio playwright has *only* speech at his disposal--with a little support from sound effects. The following example shows how a short narrative can be communicated through dialogue:

NARRATIVE: The second time Anne came home late, Aunt Matilda was waiting up. There followed a memorable row.

DIALOGUE:

(Squeaking door)

AUNT MATILDA: Do you know what time it is, young woman?

ANNE: Oh! Aunt, you startled me.

AM: This is the second night in a week you've crept home past 10:00. I expect an explanation.

A: Please, Aunt. I'm so tired. Can we talk about this in the morning?

AM: No, indeed. I demand to know what you're doing out so late.

A: I . . . I'm afraid I can't tell you.

AM: Can't tell me? Such impudence. Is this the way my generosity is rewarded? All the months I've fed and sheltered you,
etc., etc.

Notice how much the dialogue can tell us about the characters. We gather that Anne, though young, is old enough to be out alone after dark, that she has a secret of some kind, and that she is boarding with her aunt. We can also guess that the Aunt is a difficult person to board with. Further developments, however, may prove that

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Aunt Matilda is justified in her suspicions and may even turn out to be the hero of the story.

ASSIGNMENT 7-B. To try your hand at a radio play, choose one of the following narratives to tell in dialogue form. (If you prefer, you may choose another passage, but your choice should be pure narrative, with no dialogue.) Determine the characters involved, name them if necessary, and write a short play (or "episode") that communicates all the action in the narrative using *dialogue only*. You may add sound effects where they apply.

The soldiers planned to kill the prisoners to prevent any of them from swimming away and escaping. But the centurion wanted to spare Paul's life and kept them from carrying out their plan. He ordered those who could swim to jump overboard first and get to land. The rest were to get there on planks or on pieces of the ship. In this way everyone reached land in safety.

Acts 27:42-44

I am sorry to say that Peter was not very well during the evening. His mother put him to bed, and made some camomile tea; and she gave a dose of it to Peter!

"One table-spoonful to be taken at bedtime."

But Flopsy, Mopsy and Cottontail had bread and milk and blackberries for supper.

Beatrix Potter, *The Tale of Peter Rabbit*

All up and down the lines the men blinked at one another, unable to realize that the hour they had waited for so long was actually at hand. There was a truce, they could see that, and presently the word was passed that Grant and Lee were going to meet in the little village that lay now between the two lines, and no one could doubt that Lee was going to surrender. It was Palm Sunday, and they would all live to see Easter, and with the guns quieted it might be easier to comprehend the mystery and the promise of that day.

Bruce Catton, *A Stillness at Appomattox*

As you may have discovered, a disadvantage of dialogue is that it takes up much more space than narrative. Too much dialogue can also drag down the action. But when used well, dialogue is pure gold for making characters come alive, revealing their motives, and giving the reader a sense of "being there."

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Read the narrative again and ask yourself if you represented the feelings of your character(s) fairly. Then revise according to Revision Checklist #2, make a neat copy and keep it with your original narrative.

JUST IMAGINE: Think about one scene in a movie you saw or a book you read that impressed you. The scene should include at least two characters. Write a short version (two or three paragraphs) of that scene in which you are one of the characters. Write in first person, imagining the character's feelings, describing the situation from his or her point of view and including any dialogue you can remember.

Write the same scene again, but from another character's point of view. This person will understand (or not understand) the situation from a different angle, a different set of values, possibly even a different location. Your two versions should make that clear. Write the second version, then put them both aside.

Reread both versions of the scene and add any details you think would improve them. Make corrections according to Revision Checklist #2, then write your final copy.

If you've written a scene out of a book, the author of the book would probably be interested in reading it. Most authors (assuming they're still alive), are delighted to hear from their readers, and may well take the time to reply. Authors may be reached by addressing mail to them in care of the publisher, and your library can supply the address of any publishing house.

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9. STORY

A. What is a story?

You may think you've already written stories in this course, but guess again. Narratives, strictly speaking, are not stories. The two may seem just alike, but they differ in **purpose**.

The purpose of a narrative is simply to tell (in a vivid and entertaining manner, of course) what happened. That's why we spent some time in sequencing and detail. The purpose of a story goes beyond telling what happened. The story writer may wish to show *why* it happened, or explain the effect of the action on the characters involved.

A story writer will be concerned with structure and form; he or she will give more attention to certain events than others, will dwell on some details and pass over others, may even rearrange a sequence in the interest of making a point or creating a mood. "Focusing in" (remember?) is a vital part of story writing. So is good sentence structure, sound description, concrete nouns, strong verbs, and everything else we have studied in this book. When writing a story, a writer uses all of his or her skills to say something--to make a point or communicate a message.

Several years ago, when I was on vacation in the northwest, my purse was stolen. All my cash, credit cards and checks were suddenly gone. I did have a suitcase and a car with half a tank of gas, but no money for food or lodging. A **narrative** about that vacation would have told what happened (preferably just one part of it in detail) but I decided to write a **story**, because I wanted to show how God cared for me in that situation and what I learned from it. In a **narrative** the event itself would have been the important thing. In the **story** I ended up writing, God's care was the important thing, and I used the events to illustrate that care.

That is not to say that all good stories have to hit the reader over the head with an Important Message. The purpose of many stories is simply to entertain, and that's a worthy goal, too. Even to entertain, though, a story must be carefully planned to have the effect you want it to have.

B. Story structure

Narrative, once again, is a well-related sequence of events, like lengths of lumber neatly laid out in a hardware store. **Story** is the same lumber, cut, fitted, and nailed together to build a house. Just as a house should have a plan before the builder begins, a story should have a **structure**.

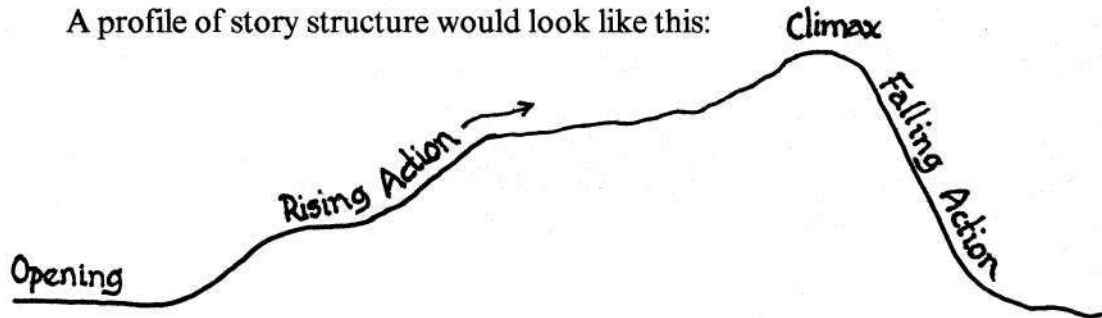
The basic structure of a story is:

1. **Opening.** Usually just a paragraph, sometimes as brief as one sentence, to attract the reader and set the stage.
2. **Rising action.** Covers about one-half to three-fourths of the story. Shows actions leading up to the climax. Also can reveal character and show how the characters move the action.

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3. **Climax.** One-fourth or less. The high point of the story, to which all previous action has led.
4. **Falling action.** One-fourth or less. Shows logical results of the climax, and concludes the story.

A profile of story structure would look like this:



Notice that it takes a long time to build up to the climax, and only a short time to finish, just as it may take hours to climb a mountain, but only a few seconds to fall off. Usually a story starts out with all kinds of possibilities, a sense that anything could happen. But after the climax there are few surprises. Everything left over is "anti-climax," and no reader wants to slog along through pages of conclusion after the suspense is gone.

Story structure is not just for fictional tales. Stories drawn from your own experience or historical fact can be, and often are, shaped to follow the same pattern. Fitting an actual experience to a pattern does not mean falsifying the experience at all --it just means deciding what to leave out, what to tell, and how to tell it. This is the way that stories have been told for thousands of years, and no one has come up with an improvement on the basic formula. As an example, notice the comparison of two very old stories--one a fable, the other from the Bible:

THE BOY WHO CRIED WOLF

OPENING:

"Once upon a time there lived a boy who watched the sheep for his village."

RISING ACTION:

The boy continually plays tricks on his village by crying "wolf" when there was no wolf. Though he is warned by his parents and the village elders, he persists in his silly game.

CLIMAX:

A real wolf appears and the boy's warning is ignored.

FALLING ACTION:

The boy is killed because no one listens to him. Don't let this happen to you!

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THE STORY OF RUTH

OPENING:

Elimelech's family emigrates to Moab; Ruth marries into the family. Elimelech and his sons die.

RISING ACTION:

Ruth and Naomi return to Bethlehem.
Ruth gleanes in the fields of Boaz.
Boaz meets Ruth and shows kindness to her.
Naomi hatches a plan.
Boaz confesses his love for Ruth but admits a problem: another man has a prior claim.

CLIMAX:

Boaz confronts his rival and wins Ruth.

FALLING ACTION:

Marriage of Ruth and Boaz, genealogy of David.

TRY IT: Find a human interest article (as opposed to a news article) in the evening paper--no violent crimes, please. Newspaper "stories" are not stories at all in the sense that I am using here, but with some thought you could make a story out of it. Make a list of the events related in the feature. Where's the climax? Underline it. What details lead to the climax, and which could be left out? What purpose (entertaining, moral, inspirational) could this story have? How could you structure the events to bring this out? Could anything be added, any details filled in? Make an outline like the one above and fill in with a story structure.

Now go back to the collection of narratives you wrote in Section 6 (the section you thought was safely behind you), and choose the one you like best. Read it once again. How do the events in your narrative fit the classic story structure? Can you designate the rising action? Do the events build to a climax? It may be that your narrative is already very close to being a story, but chances are it's not quite there yet. What's missing?

Look back at the ski narrative on page 56. The author wrote a lovely, evocative paragraph that includes action, description, emotion, etc., but if she had been trying to write a story she would have missed the mark. What's missing is a sense of **conflict**.

The narrative you wrote may have rising action, climax and falling action. For example: you spend a long hot day in the car, tempers get short, *finally* comes the blissful plunge into the motel pool and the world is bright again. But without a central conflict it's not a story. Every book you've ever read, every play, movie or TV show you've ever seen has at least one conflict. It may be between individuals (Jim and Long John Silver in *Treasure Island*, for example). Or it may be between a character and his society (Elliot and the government men in *E.T.*), or one group against another (Aslan's forces vs. the crew of the White Witch in *The Lion, The*

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Witch and The Wardrobe). Quite often, the main conflict is between an individual and his own human failings.

Back to the ski narrative: if we wished to create a conflict, we could show how the heroine has been fighting all day--fighting the elements, the force of gravity, her equipment and her own discouragement. She recognizes and dislikes a tendency in herself to give up too easily, and this time she's determined to see it through. The rising action would show her struggles, her tears, a temptation to call it quits. The climax could be the moment when she catches a glimmer of hope through one small success. *Or*, the climax could come when she suffers her worst fall and faces her deepest discouragement--but determines to get up and try again. One climax emphasizes hope, the other emphasizes will power. It's up to the author to decide just where the climax will come, depending on what he or she wants to say.

At the point of climax, the story turns a corner. The conflict is **resolved**. The narrative paragraph picturing that last downhill run would do very nicely (and almost literally) for falling action, as our heroine celebrates victory not just over the slope, but over her own discouragement.

I won't ask you to rewrite your narrative as a story, but take a moment to think of it as a story. The events narrated will probably suggest some sort of conflict to you--could the rising action be structured to show that conflict? Locate the turning point, or **resolution**, when the conflict is settled one way or another. That's your climax. Write your possible story structure below:

Rising Action:

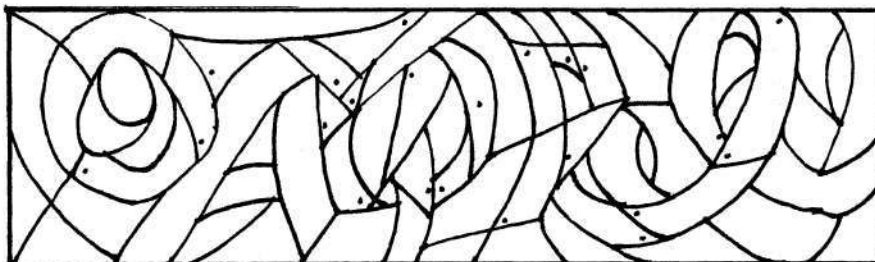
- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

Climax:

Falling Action:

C. Me?! Write a story?

You've probably seen puzzles like the one below. If you colored every space that contains a dot, a word or picture will emerge. What is the word? (The puzzle is an illustration only--you are not required to color in this course.)



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Just as you would color only the spaces with a dot in order to reveal the word, when you sit down to write you must include only those details and incidents that reveal your purpose. This is easier said than done, of course.

Suppose someone escorted you into a warehouse, parked you in front of a chunk of marble twice as tall as you, and said, "We want a new statue for Millard Fillmore Memorial Park. Here's a mallet and chisel. Sculpt us a statue of Millard Fillmore--or else." Chances are, you'd panic. You've never sculpted so much as a toothpick before; how can they expect you to turn out a statue of a man you've never seen when you've no idea where to begin?

You may have the same feelings when you are asked to write a story. Where to begin? What to say? What to write about? By now you've learned that you have a lot of experiences to write about, but even at that, it isn't easy to chip a good story out of the huge chunk of your experience. However, remember that you've already practiced picking and choosing. When you describe a person, you stay close to one overriding impression of that person. When narrating action you focus on one incident. In the description of a place you include only those details that communicate your strongest feelings about that place. You chip, in other words--chip away until one polished, shaped segment of your experience is expressed in words.

Think of something that happened to you, an incident that changed you, that taught you something. Perhaps it was the moment you realized that someone really loved you, or that time when you realized how selfish you were behaving, or the family get-together that turned out to be more fun than you had thought, or the accident that could have been fatal, or the "weird" person you came to respect. It's not always the dramatic, exciting experiences that change us, but often the everyday occurrences that we don't appreciate until we look back on them.

As you probably guessed, you are about to write about that experience--a **story**, not a **narrative**. Before you write a line, you need to think about how your story will be structured. On a clean sheet of notebook paper, write the central conflict: is it between you and another individual? you and yourself? your group against another group? Or does the conflict arise between other parties, with you as an observer or a go-between? All these or a combination of any are possible.

Once you've identified the conflict you can make your outline. Start with the climax; this will be the turning point, the face-off. Where would you locate the climax in your story?

Write the climax on a line about halfway down the page, then list the events that led up to it. Here you'll have to think carefully about what you consider to be important, and what your reader would have to know in order to understand the climax and conclusion. For now, just list the *events* that created the conflict and brought it to a head.

Below the climax, list one or two results of it; the falling action. The items you list should proceed logically from the progression of your story.

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Now you have an outline, a skeleton. The story you write will be the flesh on these bones. Before you get started, ask someone to read your skeleton--outline, I mean--and see if the progression makes sense. If this person is familiar with the story you plan to tell, he or she may think of an important step you left out. Consider any suggestions, but *you* make the final decision about what goes into your story.

You're ready to begin the most ambitious assignment in this book. Take a day off.

D. Getting off the ground

Which of these sentences would make the best opening for a story? Rate them from "4" for "most interesting" to "1" for "least interesting":

- _____ "This is going to be the greatest vacation we ever had," Dad promised.
- _____ Once our family went to Hawaii for a summer vacation.
- _____ I lay flat on the surfboard, tingling with anticipation as the next wave roared up behind me.
- _____ As we packed our suitcases for Hawaii, I had no way of knowing how memorable this vacation was going to be.

Opening sentences are important. If you ranked the second sentence as the least interesting, I agree with you. Do *not*, at least this time, start your story with the words "once," or "one," as in "one day," "one time," "one summer," etc. I forbid this not because such sentences are bad, but because they are too easy. Try something different!

A technique many authors use is to begin the story slap dab in the middle of the action, as in the third sentence above, or in these examples: "I gently turned the knob and eased the door open." "Stephanie leaned over me, glaring."

Others prefer a bit of introduction, to slide the reader into a time and place: "The summer I spent at my Grandma's in Maine seems almost magical to me now."

Still others begin with a hint of how the story will turn out: "Later Marigold asked herself if she would have attended the garden party had she known that Reginald would be there."

You get to decide which approach is best for your story. Just remember, the opening sentence should catch the reader's interest enough to make him (or her) want to read more. Write three or four opening sentences, then choose the one that makes the best attention-grabber.

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You have a plan, an outline, and an opening sentence: you're on a roll! From here on your story will follow the rules for narrative writing, for the main difference between story and narrative is not style but structure. As you write, keep these guidelines in mind:

1. Use first person, at least this time. When you have more experience with story writing it will be fun to try different "persons" and points of view.
2. Explain any background the reader needs to know in a summary paragraph.
3. Stay focused on the events leading to the climax.
4. Use sensory details--tell what you saw, heard, touched and felt.
5. **Show, don't tell.** Don't explain that "Dad was upset," but show by Dad's actions and words how he felt. Use facial expressions, posture, and actions, as you did when describing people in section 4.
6. Use some dialogue (back and forth conversation) at least once, along with single direct quotes.
7. Include some description of the place your story occurs, or, if the story involves more than one place, describe where the climax occurs. Description should not take more than three sentences.
8. Feel free to use figures of speech (especially simile and metaphor) as they occur to you--but don't overdo it.

I know that's a lot to think about. Did you notice how story writing includes all the aspects of writing you've practiced in this book? (You may exclude poetry, but I think a little poetry works its way into all good writing.) Reading this list of guidelines several times as you write will help you keep them in mind. It may help to refer to them if you get stuck. Don't try to write the entire story in one day, but don't let it drag out too long, either--you'll lose your train of thought. It's a good idea to indicate on your outline how much of the story you expect to write each day.

Now, get started. Length? As long as it takes to tell the story, anywhere from a few pages to twenty. Plan on at least four. Some authors start out writing short stories and end up with novels--the story just didn't quit! That's not likely to happen to you, but you may be surprised. If you get stuck, refer to the next section.

HOW TO DEAL WITH WRITERS' BLOCK

"Writers' block" is the dreaded affliction of wordsmiths who find their fountain of ideas drying up. If this happens to you, check out the following possibilities:

1. Perhaps you're just tired, and should put everything aside while you go have lunch or play softball or take a nap. Try not to stay away for more than twenty-four hours, though--the longer you're separated from your manuscript the harder it will be to get back into it.
2. You may have bogged down in too much description or too much dialogue or whatever. Check your outline again--have you taken a wrong turn? Perhaps you should not have started that explanation of why the coach said what he did or how Sally played that trick on Jason, because it took you away from the structure. Perhaps you should back up, cross out the last two or three paragraphs and get back to your outline.
3. You may discover that the *outline* is wrong. As you work the story out in actual words and sentences, new insights may come to you and you may even realize that the climax wasn't where you thought. If that's the case, take a few moments to write out a new outline. It should take much less time than the first because now you have a clearer idea of where you're headed. With the road map corrected, you should enjoy easier motoring.
4. I hate to mention it, but perhaps you shouldn't be writing *this* story at all. It could be that you don't yet understand this particular experience well enough to make a story out of it. Save it for a narrative instead. Sit back, think of something else, and start over with a new outline. All that time was not wasted--you still got lots of good writing practice in.
5. Maybe you're just lazy. Your mother would know how to deal with that better than I.

When your story is complete, proofread and put it aside for a few days while you rest up for the revision job ahead.

Take at least two days to revise. First, read the whole story to get a sense of the flow and organization. If any obvious flaw jumps out at you in the first reading, make a quick note in the margin and keep reading to the end.

Now consider the overall structure. Does the action move smoothly to the climax? Did you notice any places where more detail would have helped? Perhaps some details should be left out because they slow down your momentum. What should you add? What should you take out? Does the falling action "tie up" all the loose ends? Rethink, rearrange, cross out, draw arrows, and think some more.

Once you feel satisfied that the story flows well and you can do no more with structure, revise the text as you are accustomed. Use the story guidelines on p. 81 and Revision Checklist #2 to remind you of all you need to watch for. Mark all changes and put the story aside again.

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Some authors revise their work any number of times, but you can settle for twice unless you're a real perfectionist. Read your story once again (as well as you can maneuver around all the arrows, cross-outs and additions) and make any final changes. Copy or type it neatly and draw illustrations if you're good at that kind of thing. Then get someone to read it. Get several people to read it. Your experiences should be shared!

You have now "graduated" from this course. Perhaps you are no more enthusiastic about writing than when you started, but let me share some of my hopes for you anyway.

I hope you will feel a little more confident now when you pick up a pencil or pen. I hope you will be encouraged to experiment with words and sentences, and perhaps even have fun doing it. I hope you learn how to communicate with words more effectively, so that when your grandmother reads your next Thank-you letter she'll almost feel like you're talking to her. I hope you start looking at the world around you in a new way, noticing things you never noticed before, making discoveries about yourself and others. Most of all, I hope you understand better how to communicate the light that God has given *you*, and no one else.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: HOW TO PROOFREAD

The secret of proofreading is to train yourself to see *only* what's on the page in front of your eyes. This sounds easy, but isn't. Your brain thinks it knows what's on the page, and will allow your eyes to skip over whole groups of words if you're not careful. Even if your eyes catch a mistake your brain may not let them "see" anything wrong.

The relationship between the eyes and the brain is fascinating, but we don't have room to go into the scientific details here. The point to remember is that you can't glance over an assignment you've written and assume that you've caught every mistake. Most books are proofread several times by several readers before they're published, and even that does not guarantee a final copy with no errors. "Proofing" is difficult!

However, here are a few tricks to encourage your brain to stay alert while your eyes are trying to do their job:

1. Read your paper out loud. Reading out loud is slower than reading silently.
2. Hold a ruler under each line as you read it.
3. Read the last sentence first, then the next-to-last sentence, then the sentence before that one, and so on all the way to the beginning.
4. If you can't seem to help reading too fast, use a pencil to point to each word.

You may want to vary these techniques. They will help, but remember that it's ultimately up to you to *look* at what you've written.

APPENDIX B: HOW TO REVISE

Your goal in **proofreading** was to catch spelling, punctuation and grammatical errors. In **revision** you must dig deeper and ask yourself some hard questions, all having to do with the purpose and quality of your work. The Big Question, to which all the others relate, is: Did I say this as well as I could have?

As I mentioned before, nobody gets it right the first time. Occasionally you may sit down and whip out a story or assignment that seems inspired--but it will still need some minor revision, at least. Accept that, and aim for the best work you can do. Here are six steps to systematic revision:

1. After writing anything, let at least 24 hours pass before attempting a thorough revision.
2. When you are ready to read your work, try to distance yourself from it as much as possible. Imagine that you know *nothing* about the subject of the paper--you are ready to be informed.
3. Read through the piece in its entirety without stopping. If you see any obvious errors or problems, mark them quickly in the margins, then read on. You should try to get a feeling for the "flow," the overall structure. Some areas of your paper may seem weak--they need more detail, a little more explanation. Other areas may seem over-involved or unnecessary. You may notice places where you repeated yourself, or tried to cover too much ground in too small a space. The ending may seem too abrupt, leaving you with an unsatisfied feeling, as if you had expected more and didn't get it. If any of these seems to be a problem, note them *quickly* with a check or question mark or a secret symbol of your own (as long as you know what it means).
4. After the first reading, take a moment to review objectives on the revision checklist. With these goals firmly in mind, read your paper again, slowly and carefully this time. In the first reading you looked at the material as a whole; now you will watch for specifics. Cross out unnecessary words and phrases; make substitutions for weak nouns, verbs, or modifiers; rearrange or rewrite sentences to make them more forceful; add background information where needed to help the reader understand; add detail to help the reader "see".
5. Long narratives or stories (three pages or more) should be revised twice. After the first revision, set it aside for another 24 hours. If you have a word processor, enter the changes you made during the first revision and print it out. This gives you a clean copy to work with. For the second revision follow the same procedure, reading once for overall structure and content, again for word choice and sentence structure.
6. Your paper should look like a mess by now--if it doesn't, something's wrong! Copying this should be a pleasure as long as you can find your way around all the marginal notes, arrows and cross-outs. Your work deserves a neat, clean copy. Work slowly, write carefully and turn in your assignment with the well-earned satisfaction of having done your very best.

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REVISION CHECKLIST #1

1. Did you include several specific details?
2. Are there any nouns that could be made more concrete?
3. Should any neutral verbs be made stronger?
4. Are sentences nicely varied in length and structure?
5. Are there any colloquialisms outside a direct quote? (See Caveat #2 on p. 17.)

REVISION CHECKLIST #2

1. Do you see any unnecessary words or phrases, such as: adverbs where a strong verb would be more effective? modifiers that could be done without (especially qualifiers like "really," "very," "little," etc.)? meaningless or padded phrases ("at this point in time," "all in all," "in any case," etc.)?
2. Do you hear any "echoes"--repeated words or phrases?
3. Does the opening sentence attract attention?
4. Does the closing paragraph or sentence make a strong conclusion, or is it vague and wishy-washy?
5. Are *all* general statements supported by concrete details?
6. Do all quotes and dialogue add something to the narrative (provide information, advance story, or reveal character)?
7. Does the writing stay focused? Should any paragraphs or sentences be left out because they have little to do with the subject of your description or story?

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APPENDIX C: VERB LIST

This list is intended only to give you an idea of how many ways there are to do these basic activities. Add your own!

Verbs of Expression

Speech:

snap
growl
sneer
sniff
chatter
whisper
mumble
murmur
mutter
drawl
recite
pronounce
chant
drone
prattle
gush
stammer
stutter
sputter
shriek
howl
holler
bawl
cheer
hiss
snarl
giggle
wail
sob
scold

Sight:

leer
peep
spy
peer
squint
glare
glance
scowl
gaze
ogle
scan
behold

Verbs of Repose (sit or stand)

droop
slouch
stall
stoop
pose
straddle
loung
crouch
cower
cringe
squat
perch
roost
nestle

Verbs of Motion: (walk, run)

stride
march
lumber
amble
limp
glide
saunter
stroll
skip
strut
swagger
sweep
lope

pace
trudge
stumble
hobble
pace
march
dart
dash
gallop
tear
bolt
leap
scurry

Verbs of Contact (touch)

shove
heave
crash
ram
collide
graze
lap
nudge
press
slam
thump

grobe
tap
finger
paw
brush
caress
kiss
stroke
massage
slap
shoulder

1. Fall smells like hot apple cider.
Fall tastes like a Thanksgiving turkey.
Fall looks like red, orange, and yellow leaves,
 falling to the ground.
In fall I can hear birds flying south for the winter.
In fall I can feel crisp brown leaves
 crunching beneath my feet.

2. I like harvest time.
Harvest time is crisp, clear and cool
Like the early morning of a spring day.
The brightest red and yellow of harvest time
Are like a quivering fire.

The wind is like a whistling train
or sometimes a roaring hurricane,
And from a distance the shine of harvest time
is like the shine of gold.

The bare trees tower high above me
like giant skyscrapers,
And the leaves under my feet crackle
like a roaring fire.
The blasts of wind fetch the leaves
like an invisible hand.

And by the way, what do you think of fall?

- 3.

Remembering
the time of year I like best:
its name is spring.

I see all the plants and trees
come to life
and everything is new.
I feel the warm, sweet-smelling breeze
blow around me.

I listen to the birds
chirping and building their nests.
It reminds me
of all the good times I've had in my life.

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4. Soccer--
running into the wind,
seeing an opponent on my left,
getting plowed over, as I dribble the ball.
Smelling the grass,
tasting the dirt,
hearing the referee's shrill whistle.

Getting up,
taking a free kick,
rocketing the ball back to a teammate.

Kicking the ball through a cage of legs,
running towards the goal
as I score for my team!

Huddling with the coach,
making plans,
picking positions,
yawning on the benches,
warming the seat for a teammate.

Winning the game!--
(some things never change)
walking out to the car.

Going home now,
taking a shower,
glance at the calendar:
more practice tomorrow.
Soccer.

5. Before dawn, a spooky-looking piece of sky
Creeps up over the hills
And settles down in the valleys.
Like a ghost, it sneaks between the trees
And gives everything a cold, damp feeling.
Silently it came, and silently it slides away,
Leaving no trace that it had ever been there.

6. **Black**
looks like the darkness of a moonless night,
sounds like someone sneaking up on you,
smells like hot tar,
tastes like overripe berries,
feels like a soft leather jacket.

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Descriptions:

7. It's dark outside. Inside I'm sitting at a desk, with a grayish off-white computer monitor staring at me. I hear the soft humming of computers and the loud crack of the printer. My hand is resting on smooth wood. I smell cigarette smoke and the crisp scent of new paper. Directly in front of me are boxes stuffed with disks. A radio is playing softly at my right and at my left is a stack of papers packed into folders. Arghhhh, this place makes me tired.

8. You walk past some brown, half-dead prickly bushes, then up the gray concrete steps to the cold black door you always need to push to get open. As you step in, the sound of babies cooing and the low murmur of the TV is usually in the background. When you walk in it looks as though someone were walking toward you, then you realize it is just your reflection in the hall mirror. You sit down in the living room, and feel like you're about to sink right through the soft, dark couch. Across from the living room are double doors which let in the soft, warm sunshine. The atmosphere at my friend's house, any time of day, is relaxing and comfortable.

9. The sun is setting. I look around in this eerie place and see brown and white bottles, drawers full of papers, sick-looking people, barred windows. I'm surrounded by shelves with bottles on them. Strange sounds meet my ears: the continuous scrape of a knife across a tray, a phone ringing, a printer squealing, and a jangling bell as the cash register opens. I feel the strength of the soft, squishy cotton struggling to hold on to the neck of the bottle. I give it a yank and it releases its grip, soars through the air and lands in the trash can.

Working at my dad's pharmacy can be an interesting experience.

10. My friend is wearing a brown, black and white coat with matching white socks. She is medium-built and not very tall. It looks like she is posing for a picture as she stares out the window. I can tell by the way her tail wags that she is eager for something to happen. She is feeling good. Something like this might be going through her mind as the water meter man crosses the lawn: "You trespasser." She is on a window sill about one foot wide with the autumn sun pouring around her. Looking out the window, she says, "Grrrrr!"

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